Enhancement of Learning Support

The training and development needs of learning support assistants

Findings and Recommendations

Alison and Kevin O'Brien

April 2010

Contents

Acknowledgments

Our thanks go to the Steering Group which has supported and guided the project (Annex 1) and to the organisations, providers, representatives, learning support assistants, managers and (Annexes 2 and 3) who have so generously contributed their expertise and ideas. We are profoundly grateful to the learners who contributed their views to this report with such enthusiasm and eloquence. Information about the learner focus group contributing organisations is at annex 4. Summative information about the interview sample and the other reports which form part of the project documents are at Annex 5 and 6 respectively.

Executive Summary

This report summarises the findings of the '*enhancement of learning support'* project which explores the training needs of learning support assistants and those who manage them, across the lifelong learning sector, scope existing work and expertise and makes recommendations for future training and development activities.

The methodology adopted a mixed methods approach including desk research, an online survey, visits and focus groups and draws on interviews with176 individuals from 86 organisations across the sector and an associated literature review, together with the views of 374 LSAs and 138 managers who responded to the online survey.

Findings

Although Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) play a highly significant role in widening participation, facilitating inclusion and broadening the capacity of local services to support learners with additional needs, their role, impact and training needs are hugely under researched in the lifelong learning sector. The role and workforce profile is very diverse and this has implications for future training and development. Further research, particularly with respect to WBL and OL, would be of value.

Learners' Views

The views and experiences of learners are of critical importance in developing practice.

- Learners identified that personal qualities and values were key in determining the effectiveness of support, as well as the ability to respect learners' personal space, and promote independence and personal autonomy.

- Learners want LSAs to have the specialist skills, knowledge and understanding they require to provide effective support.

- Learners feel strongly they should have more say in when and how much support they require, and that their views are not always listened to sufficiently.

The views and Experiences of LSAs and their managers

- A substantial amount of training materials and resources exist. There is currently no central point which stores and disseminates information effectively across the sector.

- Practice in relation to induction and CPD is variable, with significant emphasis on compliance issues as opposed to the core role of supporting teaching and learning and promoting independence.

- Respondents identified a perceived lack of appropriate qualifications for LSAs, resulting in a focus on Care and Literacy and Numeracy and/or to encourage LSAs to take teaching qualifications.

- LSAs want something which recognises the value of the role of LSA as a profession in its own right.

- No clear national qualification for LSAs set within the framework of the NOS is currently available, although one is in development. Nor is there a recognised career structure within which LSAs work and progress.

- There is a need for more joint training and specific training for teachers in relation to working effectively with LSAs.

- Training for Managers of LSAs is underdeveloped.

- Time and employment status are significant barriers to training and development.

- LSAs value the opportunity to mix with others doing the same role. There are however barriers to training and the networks which exist do not typically operate at LSA level. There are therefore significant advantages to locally based training.

- LSAs need to be involved in the development of any programmes of training or professional development

- An organisational culture whose values and ethos promotes inclusion at all levels is vital for effective development.

Recommendations

The conclusions from the project research illustrate that the biggest impact is likely to be made from interventions which can be broadly described as "systemic". Therefore, the recommendations are chiefly concerned with the development of organisations and systems in which LSAs work.

Recommendation 1 Develop a web based portal to provide a common location for information and resources for LSAs and their managers. This will also support the development of a collective identity for LSAs and should improve practice by supporting the sector to share information more efficiently. This is likely to involve the development of a national organising body.

Recommendation 2 Building on effective practice, develop an approach and related resources to support the planning of customised training and professional development which is directly derived from LSAs' and teachers identified needs. This

methodology is exemplified in the Coventry Adult Service case study. Consideration could then be given to wider dissemination and national rollout.

Recommendation 3 Develop a Locally Based Network to coordinate CPD activities.

Recommendation 4 Develop an organisational audit tool.

Recommendation 5 Develop a profiling tool which individuals and organisations could use to assess skills, competencies, confidence and training needs against NOS and range of knowledge sets.

Recommendation 6 Undertake research and develop systems to provide and maintain accurate workforce data.

Recommendation 7 Develop a virtual centre of specialist expertise.

Recommendation 8 Develop a career structure and progression pathway for LSAs in lifelong learning with relevant nationally recognised qualifications from Levels 2 – 4. Information about qualifications should be published on the LSA portal.

Recommendation 9 Review Initial Teacher Training and CPD specifications for teachers to ensure that they include working with support staff.

Recommendation 10 Research and review training and CPD for managers of LSAs to ensure that management development includes their role in organisational development and managing change.

Recommendation 11 Collate, develop and publish guidance and protocols on alternative CPD approaches such as shadowing, buddying and mentoring.

Recommendation 12 Encourage the development of e-learning resources for LSAs and LSA managers. Existing resources should be identified and signposted on the LSA portal.

Recommendation 13 Develop resources to support organisations in involving learners in identifying their own support needs.

Recommendation 14 LSIS and its partners to undertake further research to identify how existing structures and systems influence the provision and nature of support and potentially discourage independence.

Recommendation 15 Explore the potential of technology for further promoting independence and identify best practice within the sector to reduce reliance on physical support.

Introduction to the Enhancement of Learning Support

This report summarises the findings and recommendations of the Enhancement of Learning Support project, commissioned by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service, (LSIS) and undertaken by the Association of National Specialist Colleges, (Natspec). The overall aim of this project was to explore the training needs of learning support staff and those who manage them across the sector, scope existing work and expertise and use the resulting information to make recommendations for future training and development activities. A literature review has been undertaken in support of the project and the learner view report is available in an easy read version. It is clear that there are many resources and materials available to support the professional development of Learning Support Assistants and their managers, and some of these are included in a separate report, "Opportunities and Resources".

The project was conducted by a team of seven researchers and a project administrator (Annex 7) who have worked closely together to share information and discuss implications for future work. The methodology used adopted a mixed methods approach including desk research, an online survey, semi structured telephone and face to face interviews, visits and focus groups. Data was gathered across a limited period (January – March 2010), timescales were tight and we recognise that the resulting information could not be comprehensive. It is clear there is a good deal more to find out. Although small in scale, we believe this is nonetheless an important piece of research, as it expands our understanding of a significant and valuable part of the workforce which we know from the literature review has been hugely under researched until now.

The Enhancement of Learning Support project initially used the term "**learning support practitioner**" (LSP) to reflect the terminology present in the National Occupational Standards (NOS) currently being developed by Lifelong Learning UK for this group of staff. However, both field research and the on line survey undertaken as part of this project have clearly revealed that this is not a term which is widely used or indeed recognised by many of those working in the sector. Accordingly, throughout this report we use the term "**learning support assistant**" (LSA) to refer to those staff who have direct and regular contact with the learner (or group of learners) and whose role is to facilitate their access to identified support, within the learning process. These staff are not on a teaching or training contract; rather they work under the direction of the person(s) leading the learning. We recognise that providers use a wide variety of titles for staff supporting learning, which may include; learning support assistant, teaching assistant, learning support worker, learning support practitioners, learning facilitators, educational support worker and enablers and other terms not listed here.

It is perhaps helpful to make the distinction between "learning support" and "learner support". "Learning support" is essentially about enabling the learner to engage with the learning programme and providing personalised, identified support that will allow learners to maximise their independence, to achieve and to progress. This project focuses on learning support and the role of the learning support assistant as defined above. It does not cover learner support, which is about enabling the learner to participate by overcoming potential barriers. Learner support provides funding (e.g. for childcare, transport) and services (e.g. guidance, benefits information, counselling) which enable the learner to access the appropriate learning environment. The project does not therefore cover the staff who support these functions, nor those such as librarians and technicians whose work does not focus on providing this support to individual learners.

This report summarises the findings of three other research reports, and a literature review associated with the project listed in Annex 6. It seeks, albeit in small scale, to identify the development needs of learning support assistants by talking directly to learners, to LSAs, to those who manage them, and to representative and other related bodies and organisations about the training needs of LSAs, and their managers, and how best these might be supported. The research evidence and findings form the basis of a series of recommendations which are intended to improve practice across the sector.

This research has benefited greatly from the time given by LSAs, their managers, learners and representatives of a wide range of professional bodies across the sector. The project has uncovered a good deal of very effective practice which is highlighted through case studies in the report. Whilst the findings will highlight that which is good, more emphasis will inevitably be given to considering what is working less well and what actions could be taken to further enhance learning support across the sector.

Scope and Methodology

The scope of this report is learning provider organisations in the lifelong learning sector; these were predominantly Further Education Colleges (FE) and Independent Specialist Colleges (ISCs), but also included Adult and Community Learning (ACL), Work Based Learning (WBL) and Her Majesty's Prisons (HMP). Field research included interviews and focus groups undertaken with 176 individuals from 86 organisations (Annex 5). In determining the scope we recognised that information relating to the training needs of LSAs had already been gathered in part of the South West region for a Learning and Skills Council funded project to develop training materials http://swwdp.org.uk/contents/supporting-the-learner-journey.html. We also acknowledged that significant research exists in relation to the role of teaching assistants (TAs) in the schools sector.

This report has therefore largely focussed on providers in the North West, adopting a hybrid form of opportunity sampling which has led to the inclusion of providers from a wider geographical spread. It incorporates the views of LSAs and their managers elicited through semi structured interviews, and the findings from the on line survey and the literature review commissioned to support the wider project. Field research has been undertaken with 37 LSA managers and senior managers from 31 organisations from across the sector. Focus meetings were held with a total of 53 LSAs, and 54 learners. We were keen to ensure that the approaches for gathering learner views were as interactive and accessible as possible and adopted a multi modal approach to capturing this, using video and audio recording as well as written comment. Seeing and hearing learners talking about their experience and views is very powerful, and so, in addition to this report, we have produced a short DVD of learner voice, based on video and audio recordings taken through-out the focus group meetings. Information was also gathered through telephone interviews with 12 representatives from 16 professional and membership organisations. Copies of the semi structured interviews used in the project and the session plan for the learner focus groups can be found at annexes 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 respectively. Follow up from these interviews and meetings led to further internet based research. In addition to interviews, significant information was provided through email contact. A short report on Offender Learning (OL) is included as part of "The views of Learning Support Assistants". Information was gathered from representatives of 8 HMPs and a representative of Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) using a questionnaire, a copy of which can be found at annex 13.

We recognise however that further work to explore the specific training needs of both the work based sector and Offender Learning would be beneficial.

Survey

An online survey was conducted throughout the duration of the project which elicited 374 responses in the LSA questionnaire and 138 responses from that aimed at LSA managers. Copies of the questionnaires can be found at annexes 14 and 15. Although there were a total of 374 respondents to the LSA questionnaire, some of these clearly fell outside the workforce group we were seeking to identify. Accordingly, responses were filtered by those who used the word "support" in their job title. Responses which clearly indicated that the respondents' main role was not learning support were also excluded. This produced a subset of 247 responses who clearly differentiated their role as being learning support, and it is these results we have used to interpret findings. It is worth noting here that the vast majority of LSAs completing the questionnaire were from Further Education Colleges (79.70%), followed by ACL (9.60%), ISCs (5.70%) with work based learning making up the smallest proportion at 5%.

The survey included a mix of open and closed questions, for which respondents were required to select from a predetermined list. Although there was some element of interpretation in ascribing responses to categories, the main purpose of the survey was to increase the capacity of the project to capture the voice of practitioners within the sample. Although arguably the results included in this report should only be seen as indicative, the direct quotations provide a powerful exposition of the key themes and issues facing this group of practitioners.

Section 1: Learning Support Assistants - their role and impact

Terminology

It is interesting to note that although the term Learning Support Practitioner is used within the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for learning support staff, the research has clearly demonstrated that it is not the mostly commonly used term to describe those staff who support learners with learning difficulties and disabilities in the learning and skills sector. This was confirmed by both the interviews and the questionnaires completed by LSAs, with the most common title being "assistant" at 46% followed by "worker" at 40%. The term "Learning Support Practitioner" accounted for only 4% of those surveyed. In a work based learning context, the role of staff performing this function is quite different, as is the terminology used, which is typically "training adviser". Whilst it may be the case that the official nomenclature has moved ahead of current practice, if one of the aims of this research is to support the development of a professional identity for this group of staff, it is arguably important to get such things as terminology right from the perspective of those undertaking the role.

Lack of research

Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) play a highly significant role in widening participation, facilitating inclusion and broadening the capacity of local services to support learners with additional needs. We know, however, that the role, impact and training needs of learning support staff in the lifelong learning sector is hugely under researched. It has proved difficult to secure accurate information about numbers, the workforce profile, their qualifications and/or their employment characteristics .With one exception, the Learning and Skills Research Centre (LSRC) study by Robson et al (2006)[1], no substantial research studies were found. In addition, very little research was identified which relates to learning support within Offender Learning. The voice of the learning support assistant, and indeed the learners they support, is also noticeably lacking amongst existing research.

. The findings from the research are stark.

> *"Although this was a small scale review that cannot claim to be comprehensive, the lack of attention paid to this important segment of the lifelong learning workforce in research is both astonishing and shocking"* Faraday S, 2010

---

[1] Robson, J., Bailey, B. Mendick, H. (2006) *An investigation into the roles of learning support workers in the learning and skills sector.* LSRC. www.lsneducation.org.uk/pubs/pages/062568.aspx (accessed 3.03.10)

This lack of research becomes even more shocking given that in practice it is the LSA workforce who delivers the most significant part of the learner facing contact time, particularly for learners with the most complex needs. In one ISC included in the project, for example, 50 learners were supported by 10 tutors and 35 full time LSAs if you ignore non contact time this is equivalent to 1665 hours of total contact time of which 370 (22%) is delivered by tutors whilst 1295 (79%) is delivered by LSAs.

Impact and importance of LSAs

Given the lack of workforce data, it is perhaps not surprising that there is limited research to evaluate the impact of what LSAs do (Robson et al (2006)[2]. Even the substantial evidence base in the schools sector, which was drawn on heavily to inform this project, contains limited hard evidence about the impact of learning support. Anecdotal support for their role and impact is however overwhelming. Robson reported a widespread view that LSAs were effective or very effective in a range of ways in improving learner retention and achievement, a finding which was confirmed in this small scale piece of research. The managers of LSAs were overwhelmingly positive about the contribution of LSAs to effective learning. As one principal put it:

> *"LSAs are such an integral part of what we do...anything we can do to promote that role and recognise the complexities entailed in it is worthwhile"*

The availability of learning support, and the availability of funding to sustain it, is possibly the single most important reason for the progress made towards the inclusion of learners with learning difficulties in post 16 learning opportunities. Arguably the absence of learning support in work based learning illustrates this point. Levels of participation of this group of learners are far lower in WBL than they are in the further education sector, whether mainstream or ISC, in spite of a policy drive which has championed their inclusion.[3]

The provision of learning support for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities has facilitated a significant increase in participation. LSAs play a key role both in making organisations more inclusive and opening up access to learning for groups previously excluded. Their wider strategic importance should not be under estimated within a policy context which promotes widening participation, particularly for learners with the most complex needs. The learning support workforce provides the means by which organisations meet their commitments to inclusion. It follows therefore, that their role, status, training and development is a priority, if we are to maintain and extend progress towards a more inclusive and effective sector.

---

[2] Robson, et al (2006) op cit
[3] Through Inclusion to Excellence, LSC, (2005)

The Profile of the Workforce

It has been very difficult to ascertain reliable numbers for LSAs employed in the lifelong learning sector. The LSRC[4] research in 2006 indicated numbers in Further Education Colleges at 10,000, although this did not include staff working in either WBL or ACL. The most recent data from Lifelong Learning UK[5] records the total learning support assistant workforce in further education as 15,128. This figure is based on a sample of the Staff Individualised Record (SIR) dataset, which includes predominantly general further education colleges. It is not fully representative because it includes data from only 6 ISCs, and as a result it is likely to underestimate the total workforce.

Whilst workforce data is limited, it is clear from both the literature and the project research, that the workforce profile is incredibly diverse. Learning support teams are often a mixture of full-time staff, hourly paid staff and in some colleges, bank/agency staff. Whilst the lack of workforce data has prevented us from confirming whether this is typical across the sector, the research undertaken for this project suggests that a significant number (just over half) of LSAs are hourly paid, and many are paid on term time only contracts, with implications for, and indeed impact, on access to training.

The workforce profile of the LSAs is very different from that of almost any other professional group in the sector. It is arguably closer to that of the care sector, where the support worker role is characterised by a similar mix of hourly paid staff with high turnover and use of agency staffing. Some of the broader approaches to workforce development could be shared across sector and there may be advantages in exploring the scope for a greater alignment between activities of agencies such as Skills for Care and Lifelong Learning UK. This is particularly true as the field research illustrates that with the focus on personalisation and the introduction of Individual Budgets, learners are increasingly bringing their own support with them into the classroom. In the ISC context, the role is often integrated to provide a consistency of approach across the working day and into the residence.

The research also indicated a huge variation in the level of qualifications, skills and experiences of LSAs both on entering the profession, and as a result of ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) once employed. A number of colleges for example, reported a significant proportion of LSAs are qualified to degree level before they start work, and are seeking to gain relevant experience before moving on

---

[4] LSRC An Investigation into the roles of learning support workers in the Learning and Skills Sector , LSRC, 2006

[5] Further Education College Workforce Data for England: An Analysis of Staff Individualised Data 2008- 2009 (Lifelong Learning UK)

to related training. A number of interviewees within the sample, however, reported limited and/ or poor experience of formal education prior to starting work as LSAs. This is confirmed by the findings, which indicate a significant and common focus in training on the achievement of literacy and numeracy qualifications to level 2.

The project research also suggests that for many, the role of LSA is a lifestyle choice, with a number of respondents indicating they do not want to become teachers, but chose their role, in part because it fitted in around their life and family commitments. Respondents, were however equally clear that they view themselves as professional and effective practitioners and would like to be valued as such.

Role of LSAs

What has become clear is that the formal role of learning support is most often found in the further education sector. In other sectors the role of learning support was less well developed, particularly in work based learning and offender learning. In a work based learning context, the role of staff performing this function is quite different, as is the terminology used, which is typically "training adviser", but the formal role of learning support is not common place. The evidence from both the literature and the research support the conclusion that this is largely a product of the differences in funding that exist between the sectors, in particular the absence of an obvious route to fund additional learning support in work based learning. The following case study illustrates how learning support staff may be deployed in a work based learning context, in this case Pure Innovations. The role name is, not surprisingly, different – here it is "Employment Officer" as opposed to LSA.

Individualised Support - Learning in an supported employment setting

When someone is referred to Pure Innovations employment service they are linked to a designated Employment Officer (EO) who provides an individualised service that is based on person centred approaches. The EO finds out what a person is good at and then matches these skills to the right job. This is typically done over a period of a few weeks, and results in the creation of a work development plan. During this period as the EO gets to know the client, s/he begins to look for an appropriate job.

When a suitable job is identified, the EO ensures that the job is safe by working with the employer to identify any risks involved. Once this process is complete, a working interview is arranged and the client is supported to undertake this and demonstrate their suitability for the job. Where appropriate, Pure Innovations will work with an employer to 'customise' a job to the specific skills of an individual.

Pure Innovations provides a support package to help employers to understand the

importance of identifying work colleagues who can offer assistance as and when the need arises. Training is also arranged to address any relevant areas of disability specific to the individual, such as epilepsy training.

The EO provides training for clients in their work place. In addition, s/he ensures that the job is made easier to learn by breaking it down into small steps. This is called training by systematic instruction (TSI) The amount and nature of training provided is subject to review to reflect need. Continued training and/or updating previous training may be required, due to absence through holiday or illness. In addition, ongoing training may be required when new elements are introduced into a job.

The supported employment model described above is very much about 'learning through doing'. Pure Innovations believe people learn about work by being in work and that learning is most effective when the task is broken down into smaller components, ensuring that each stage is learned thoroughly and embedded early.

The content of training is very much determined on an individual basis. In the case of one young man, for example, in addition to work related training, input was provided to support him to learn to travel to and from work using a bus. Additional support in the workplace was also provided to ensure that he was prompted to take his breaks at the correct time.

By comparison with the general population, the prison population contains a significantly higher proportion of people with poor basic skills, low qualification results and a history of unemployment. Where a need is identified for learning support to enable the offender learner to make progress, this is in the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) developed by the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) provider, whose contract includes the delivery of learning support as appropriate to the individual's need. An Ofsted thematic report published in January 2009 on the delivery of learning and skills to offender learners with both short and long sentences commented however that:

> *"The provision of additional learning support is too variable. In prisons, learning support assistants are not always available and there is no automatic offer of support for those identified as having dyslexia or severe learning difficulties."* [6]

The research for this project found a similarly varied picture regarding the availability and style of learning support to offender learners, with a general consensus amongst survey respondents that learning support whilst, valuable, was in far too short

---

[6] Ofsted, Jan 2009, Learning and skills for offenders serving short custodial sentences

supply. One Head of Learning Support commented "we just need much, much more of it" and another wrote the following:

> *"I used to work in schools. In a typical school you would have a large SEN department with a senior manager plus up to 20 Learning Support Assistants. In prison, where the percentage of learners with "special needs" is probably 10 times as high as that in the typical school described above, there is very little provision. This needs to change."*[6]

Support for Independence - grappling with the contradictions

The research undertaken and the literature reviewed identified one common theme; that all organisations, individuals and learners described the practice of learning support for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities as being first and foremost about promoting independence. This role, of supporting independence, came out clearly in the project research and it is an assumption, both explicit and latent, which permeates much thinking and practice about learning for learners with learning difficulties. The issue for learning support assistants is how to make sense of this concept, when it is laden with contradictions and tension. Whilst learning support assistants are encouraged to support independence there is often not enough clarity about how best to combine support and independence; how to balance activity which is enabling with that which is necessary support. This is not simply an academic argument or one about semantics. LSAs in the context of provision for learners with learning difficulties are the "frontline staff", so it follows that their interpretation of the notion of support for independence goes to the heart of how they approach their work. This research has highlighted that in their professional practice, LSAs face a number of tensions which operate at Individual, organisational and system level

- At the **individual** level, this research has found that there is often no clear understanding, consistently applied in practice, about the role of LSAs in supporting independence. Whilst the ability of LSAs to stand back at appropriate times to enable learners to be more independent in their learning was identified as an important skill, both by learners and staff alike, the evidence also suggests that in practice it is not always implemented effectively.
- At an **organisational** level, the evidence suggests that the role of LSAs is undervalued generally, and this is reflected in all aspects of working practice including access to training and development
- The **systems** underpinning the delivery of support sometimes run contrary to the stated objectives of promoting independence. The model of support is typically still one that is focused on supporting the individual, an approach

which is often sustained by systems and structures of assessment, resource allocation and management. The voice of the learners in this research clearly demonstrates a preference for support that is more holistic, flexible and inclusive. Practitioners note however that systemic issues often make this difficult to deliver.

The array of names used for LSAs perhaps reflects the diversity of the role, which is very much determined by the context and the needs of those being supported. Within the sample, it was clear that the focus of activity was hugely variable, ranging from providing one to one and group support, a key aspect of the role, to the provision of specific support such as signing for a deaf learner, or interpreting for a learner whose first language is not English. LSAs also often played a key role in providing guidance to main stream tutors about the needs of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities. This variation in role has significant implications for the design and content of training and it is clear that no one size will fit all.

The development of programmes of support to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding that LSAs need to be effective is, however, only a part of the picture. The inclusiveness, culture and ethos of the organisations within which they work, the roles LSAs fulfill, their position within the staff team and the capacity of teaching staff to work with them successfully, are all themes explored in this review.

Section 2: What learners want / say about the role of LSAs

The research team considered the views and experiences of learners to be of critical importance to any recommendations around the enhancement of learning support. Consequently, a series of focus groups took place in March 2010 to seek the views of learners from a wide range of providers. Over 50 individuals, ranging in age from 15 to 50+, participated in the focus groups and interviews, from 7 organisations. The sample included people with a range of disabilities, including generalised learning difficulties, complex needs, and visual, hearing and physical impairments. The focus groups revealed that learners have very clear views about what constitutes effective support, and about how they would like to be supported. It is disappointing to note, however, that the views of learners are grossly under-represented in the literature around learning support in the lifelong learning sector, and indeed more widely. As well as listening to their experiences of learning support, their views were sought in relation to:

- the qualities they associated with effective support,
- the type of support they would like to be available for them
- the importance they attached to being involved in determining their support arrangements.

The team was keen to ensure that the approaches for gathering views were as interactive and accessible as possible and adopted a multi modal approach to capturing this, using video and audio recording as well as written comment. Seeing and hearing learners talking about their experience and views is very powerful, and so, in addition to this report, a short DVD of learner voice has been produced, based on video and audio recordings taken through-out the focus group meetings.

The role of learning support

It is perhaps not surprising that when asked about the role of learning support that a central response was around "helping you to learn". The value of this was clearly linked to achievements judged to be of value to the learner, such as in a work context, and also in terms of accessing community and social activities. This is clearly linked to raising aspirations and improving confidence –"showing me that no obstacle should be in my way". Learners thought that learning, and by association, learning support, should be enjoyable. They saw it as being chiefly associated with "enabling" – enabling activities to take place, enabling choice "allowing you to make decisions", promoting active participation and providing individualised support. These themes of enabling choice and control have clear relevance for delivering a personalised learning experience.

The importance of personal qualities

It was clear in talking to learners that personal qualities were key in determining the effectiveness of support. When asked about their views of effective support, learners typically talked in terms of personal characteristics, citing for example, the need to "be friendly, understanding", "enthusiastic" "caring" "relaxed" and "patient and calm". Implicit in these comments is something around the underpinning value of respect. As one learner with a hearing impairment wryly commented "Someone who is deaf is no different and should not be treated as such, same eyes, same mouth, and same brain."

Knowledge, understanding and training needs

In addition to these personal skills and qualities, learners also highlighted the importance of knowledge. Whilst it was clear that knowledge was an issue, the requirement for this to be subject specific did not feature highly in learners' priorities. They highlighted instead the importance of understanding and knowledge in relation to the impact of a disability not only on learning but in relation to the individual. This ranged from understanding medication regimes, to specialist understanding of assistive resources and technology. Learners also wanted to be consulted about their support needs, rather than having assumptions made based on what is known in general terms about a disability.

It is interesting to note that when asked about training needs, learners identified some of those elements typically associated with compliance, such as health and safety, first aid and medication. Despite the vast range of skills, personal qualities, knowledge and understanding they identified were needed by LSAs, learners did not typically link this to training. There were however some clear training needs associated in supporting learners with specific disabilities, such as skills in mobility for staff supporting learners with a visual loss and signing skills for those working with deaf learners. Here too, however, learners noted the importance of associated personal qualities such as patience, empathy and communication in the practical application of such skills. "Support workers need outstanding communication to be able to do more than just interpret"

The promotion of independence and personal autonomy

In listening to learners, a central theme emerged around the importance of LSAs respecting learners' personal space, and promoting independence and personal autonomy. The detrimental effect of being over supported was acknowledged, and in particular of being "followed around", although this was more often a complaint related to learners' experiences of support in a school based context. Learners noted that sometimes inappropriate support is driven by the system, such as the identification of support needs in statements which do not apply in the FE sector.

Research could usefully be undertaken to identify how existing systems and structures in the lifelong learning sector influence the provision and nature of support. There might be potential to review or adapt these, in order to create greater flexibility to adjust support, and/or to promote the reduction of support dependence where appropriate. Learners feel they should have more say in when and how much support they require, and the experiences of a significant number of those interviewed suggests that they feel their views are not always listened to in this regard. Learners also identified the perceived "social stigma" related to being supported by an LSA. This was not just about the provision of support, per se, but the way it was provided. Learners valued the skills involved in providing unobtrusive support, and recognised the capacity this had to reduce the stigma of being supported amongst their peer group. At the same time, they recognised the contribution appropriate support has in "*making me feel safe*" - "*having someone always there is reassuring*".

It is interesting to note, that while the views of learners are widely underrepresented in the literature, the comments they make chime very effectively with the findings around effective practice, as the extract below from the literature review produced in support of this project amply demonstrates:

> "*In a review of evidence on the impact of support staff, Howes (2003)[7] concluded that the way in which support was provided led to either inclusion or exclusion. Where support was provided for a group and for an individual in the context of the group, promoting interaction between disabled and non-disabled learners, it led to inclusion. In contrast, where support was provided in isolation to an individual, where a TA was 'attached' to a single learner, described as the 'velcro' model (Gershel 2005),[8] it could lead to dependency, exclusion and stigmatisation.*" Faraday, S 2010.

Where LSAs were effective at providing appropriate support as discreetly as possible this was not only valued, but recognised as being a significant skill by the learners they support.

It is also clear that learners value being supported in a way which **actively promotes** independence; learning to do things on their own with guidance when required, as opposed to being constantly directed or told what to do.

The right to be involved in defining own support

Perhaps the most significant finding relates to the importance of learners playing a key role in defining, contributing to and owning their own support packages. The

---

[7] Howes, A. (2003). Teaching reforms and the impact of paid adult support on participation and learning in mainstream schools. In *Support for Learning • Volume 18 • Number 4 •* 2003 pp147-153

[8] Gershel, L. (2005). The special educational needs coordinator's role in managing teaching assistants: the Greenwich perspective. In *Support for Learning • Volume 20 • Number 2 •* 2005 pp 69-70

relationship between an LSA and a learner was powerfully described by one contributor as being "a partnership arrangement and not a one way process".

In looking at what learners have said about the role, personal qualities, training needs, skills and experiences of both effective and ineffective practice, it is clear that they are skilled in understanding their own support needs and what that means for those who support them. The majority of those spoken to could identify what they personally found difficult, and what support they required. Whilst learners with more complex communication difficulties found it more difficult to articulate, they were, for example, able to clearly state they did not want to be followed around, with an LSA attached to them at the hip. They also noted that they were often assigned support without consultation. The overwhelming consensus was that learners wanted to be, and felt they should be, consulted about the way in which support is conducted.

Practice and skills associated with effective support

In addition to the personal qualities, knowledge, understanding and the capacity to promote independence and personal autonomy previously noted, learners were asked to identify the key features they associate with effective practice. These can broadly be broken down into the following areas:

- Effective time management
- Getting the level of challenge right
- Providing learning in an appropriate context
- Communication skills
- Supporting behaviour
- Developing and using resources

Ineffective support was, not surprisingly, characterised by the absence of personal qualities, over support and a lack of knowledge and skills related to the use of specific equipment or software

It is clear that learners value the support that is provided to them but also that they are very clear about what and how it should be provided. The list of personal qualities, skills, knowledge and understanding required, as identified above is testimony to both the complexity, and the responsibility, associated with this role. Whilst this has clear implications for training, there is a sense that it is more than that. As one learner put it, "Most of all it's about learning and earning trust – disclosing barriers that prevent learning and acting on these with learners to instil this trust while promoting independence."

Illustrated model of an ideal support worker produced by one group

Section 3: The Training and Development Needs of LSAs

As noted previously, one of the most significant findings to emerge from this project is the sheer complexity and diversity of the roles LSAs fulfill in a vast array of different contexts. This has huge implications for future training and development planning, in that one size does not, and will not fit all.

The Information deficit

In talking to LSAs and their managers, about the training and development provided for LSAs, it was clear that the issue is not simply a lack of materials, CPD or qualifications, although this is a concern. As the findings summarized below illustrate, there are a lot of training resources available. The issue for providers is as much about how they access information about what is available, nationally and locally, and how they identify what is most suitable for their context and needs. The biggest issue is that there is no central information point and a lack of easily accessible information for LSAs and those who manage them. In the schools sector, there is the Training and Development Agency website, with its comprehensive list of information for Teaching Assistants. Similarly, there is no professional membership association for LSAs in lifelong learning, such as the National Association of Professional Teaching Assistants (NAPTA) for TAs in schools which is a central resource.

The National Association of Professional Teaching Assistants (NAPTA)

NAPTA is a membership organisation that works chiefly with schools and local authorities to realise the potential of support staff, whatever their role. It developed in direct response to a group of TAs needs, and now provides a web based location for TAs and their managers to find news, information, advice and planning resources.

NAPTA is run by education specialists, with a number of experienced teaching assistants on its executive. It works in close partnership with the Cambridge Institute of Technology (INTEC) and the Pearson Publishing Group, including its founding company Pearson Information, so is able to pool expertise in the development of products and resources to support its members.

NAPTA initially grew out of a project undertaken by Regent College in Leicester designed to support an underrepresented group, Bangladeshi women, into programmes for employer based learners. Leicester has a high proportion of ethnic minorities, and as a result, schools were experiencing difficulties in obtaining language support for children for whom English was a second language. There was a clear coincidence of wants between the schools need for fluent Bangladeshi speakers, and the skill set of the would

be workforce. The project was a great success. All 38 women moved into work, and a significant proportion then progressed to a teaching qualification. The cohort continued however to need support and advice, and so the association was established.

With the advent of workforce development in schools, and the associated enhanced role of the teaching assistant (TA), the membership quickly increased. The value of the online training needs analysis which NAPTA developed to take account of the NOS, was recognised by schools and Local authorities alike as valuable. Today the organisation has over a hundred thousand members in thousands of schools.

The technology is without doubt invaluable, because it can pin point individual training needs. Typically it reveals that individuals do not necessarily need an entire course or programme, but have small and specific areas for development, many of which can effectively be "topped up". Once gaps in training are identified, the technology is then used to link individuals with locally based training opportunities, many of which take place in their own work situation.

The success of the organisation does not however reside wholly in the online profiling tool, although this is clearly effective. It is the fact that the programmes are delivered face to face in school to which the Chief Executive of NAPTA attributes its success.

We have acknowledged elsewhere in the report that the LSA workforce is diverse, and the same is true in the school context. NAPTA's approaches enables this workforce to undertake local training, often in their own school, targeted directly at individually identified need, so relevant, and as a result uptake is high.

Existing knowledge and resources could be leveraged more effectively and have greater impact, if LSAs and their managers were provided with a facility which allowed them to navigate the full range of existing information. In practice, much of the training and development activities provided are often "path dependent", that is providers typically offer programmes based on historic patterns and custom and practice.

The impact of this is reflected, in the following sections, which explore the options open to LSAs at induction, through formal training and qualifications and through ongoing CPD. The evidence indicates a fragmented picture overall, with some effective practice but wide variation in what is offered and significant barriers in terms of access. The following findings are drawn from the views and experiences of the LSAs and managers who contributed to this project.

Induction

The research evidence from the LSAs interviewed and those that responded to the online questionnaire is that typically the induction programme for new LSAs was the same as for all other staff, there was little specifically on the role of the LSA and almost no content on how to support teaching and learning within induction. Indeed the overwhelming majority of the survey respondents (80%) reported a series of training activities that could be broadly categorised as "compliance" related, covering areas such as health and safety, safeguarding, equality and diversity. This finding was confirmed by LSA managers. It is worth noting however, that shadowing colleagues which most LSAs had undertaken for a period of between two and three weeks as part of their induction, was generally perceived to have been of value by the majority of respondents, with a typical comment being;

> *"the shadowing led to a good induction"*

Whilst all LSAs interviewed indicated there was an induction programme for new LSAs, the degree to which they felt this adequately prepared them for their role was variable. Whilst some were positive about their experiences:

> *"The induction provided all the information I would need to fully understand my role within the college and to what my job entailed."*

the majority of respondents, in both interviews and the survey, were ambivalent. When asked to rate the extent to which induction was effective in supporting them in their role from 5 Highly Effective to 1 Ineffective the overall satisfaction response rate was only just above average at 3.3. It is important to note here that a number of LSAs interviewed had been in their role for many years and could not easily remember their induction. This may affect the validity of aspects of the information supplied and the degree to which it is representative.

A number of the LSAs spoken to thought the use of DVD materials showing good LSA practice would be very useful at induction.

Qualifications: A Galaxy of Qualifications but no Guiding star!

The most notable characteristic about the pattern of the formal qualification results from the research was the absence of any real pattern. The field research and questionnaire produced a galaxy of qualifications and accreditation routes, but very often there was not a clear rationale why providers chose one route over another. For those supporting learners with sensory impairments, disability specific qualifications were more homogenous and reflected some formal expectation. However, whilst a formal qualification is the gateway to a teaching role, nothing comparable exists for LSAs. As one LSA manager commented:

"One of the criteria in selection for most roles at college is that you would be qualified- this is relaxed for LSAs. The majority are not, and do not become qualified. And this is partly because we are not sure what they should do or what is appropriate for their role."

The chart below illustrates the results when LSA respondents were asked to list the nationally accredited training they had completed or were expected to achieve
Nationally Accredited Training

Nationally Accredited Qualifications

- NVQ in Learning Support — 30%
- NVQ 2 or 3 in Health and Social Care — 35%
- Certificate in Learning Support — 10%
- PTLLS — 12%
- Teaching Assistants level 1 & 2 — 10%
- Others — 3%
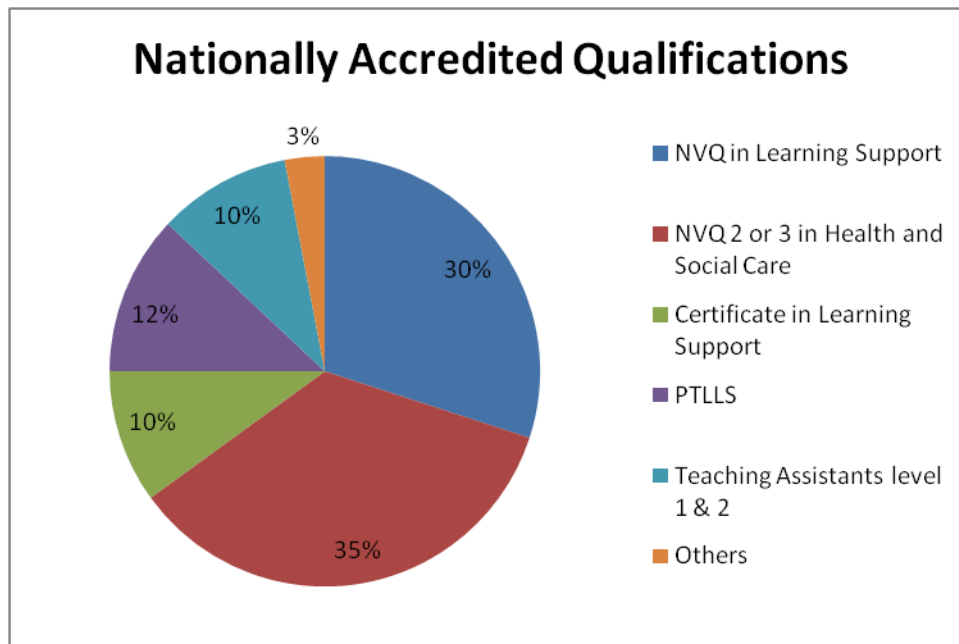
This clearly shows that NVQ 2 or 3 in health and social case was the most common qualification reported (35%), closely followed by NVQ 2 in Learning Support (30%). It is interesting to note that there was a noticeable lack of correlation between the responses provided by LSAs and those of their managers when asked about the qualifications LSAs are expected to get. Whilst NVQ Level 3 in Care and Level 2 in Literacy and Numeracy qualifications were the most common qualifications identified by the LSAs interviewed, almost half of the LSA managers interviewed indicated there were no requirements in their college for LSAs to gain specific, or indeed any other qualifications. All LSA managers were however concerned about the perceived lack of appropriate qualifications for LSAs working in the learning and skills sector. Many indicated that the qualifications for Teaching Assistants in schools are readily available but they are not appropriate for LSAs working in colleges.

"There are a lot of national qualifications at) Levels 2 and 3 and some foundation degrees at Level 4, but these are mostly for staff in schools and aren't really relevant for our setting"

No single qualification was identified as being the most appropriate or popular. Indeed a number of respondents pointed to a lack of an appropriate qualification route, with one respondent commenting:

"None because nothing suitable is available to date"

Another commented;

"I find it difficult to find to find a suitable course that is aimed at providing support at FE level. Course are either aimed at schools or adults"

There was a strong consensus that finding accreditation that was relevant and matched the job description and what LSAs did in practice was a real challenge. As a result, many LSAs were encouraged or expected to take teaching qualifications, whether or not they saw their career pathways leading them in that direction

In the online survey respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with national qualifications and although broadly positive at an average of 52%, an analysis of the comments accompanying the survey data, and supplied at interview provides a somewhat different picture. There is in the anecdotal responses, a strong sense that many LSAs do not feel the qualifications currently open to them meet their needs, or accord their role sufficient professional status or value. Rather than being forced to go down the route of acquiring a teaching qualification, LSAs want something which recognises the value of the role of LSA as a profession in its own right. As one respondent put it;

"There is not a lot for people who want to make a career out of supporting adult learners with special needs. The accreditation seems to push you down the teaching route. Supporting should be just as valued as teaching. You need to be just as skilled as the teacher to be an effective support. There doesn't seem to be any clear route for qualifications in this field."

Another commented:

The role is not considered "professional" but should be, and there should be qualifications to undertake to achieve recognition as a professional role"

Lack of Career Structure

The galaxy of qualifications reflects the fact that to date no clear national qualification for LSAs set within the framework of the NOS is currently available, although one is in development. Nor is there a recognised career structure within which LSAs work and progress. Within the schools sector, the workforce reform agenda has had a significant impact on both the professionalisation and skills of the workforce. Teaching Assistants in school have a clearly identified entitlement to both induction and annual CPD. The role has further developed to include that of the more senior Higher Level Teaching Assistant, whose role includes working with groups and

whole classes for a certain period and providing supervision for pupils in the absence of the teacher normally timetabled for that class. There are clearly identified qualification routes to support both roles and also an obvious career structure for those seeking progression within the role of the TA. Without either framework, providers in the lifelong learning sector use whatever training is available with varying degrees of success. In some cases providers have established their own very successful programmes tailored very much to their specific needs and have partnered with a range of organisations, some within the higher education sector.

Weston College, (FE) and Beaumont College (ISC) have both worked with local universities to develop a Foundation Degree in learning support for their LSAs.

Weston College – The role of the "Specialist Support Instructor" and associated training

Weston College was fully inspected in January 2008, when it was judged to have both "*outstanding arrangements for support*" and "*outstanding educational and social inclusion*". Inspectors noted "*Additional learning Support is very effective. Additional learning needs are identified promptly; take up rates for offered support are high.*" and perhaps most worthy of note, "...*support has a significant impact on success rates*". More recently (Spring 2010) the college has been visited as part of the current OFSTED survey, due to report in June 2010, focussing on learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, when again its practice and approach has been deemed to be exemplary.

Weston College has developed an innovative approach to the provision of Additional Leaning Support (ALS), with clear benefits to the learners it supports. The college recognised that it had a number of skilled and enthusiastic LSAs, whose only natural progression route was into teaching, and yet for many, this was not what they wanted. To address this, the college has developed a two pronged response. It has created a structure within ALS, which includes different levels of support including the post of "Specialist Support Instructors" and it has worked in partnership with the University of West of England to develop a Foundation Degree in Inclusive Practice.

The college has a high level of commitment to training. When new LSAs are appointed, they typically shadow other practitioners for a period, to become familiar with the provision. The college is careful to match the roles and curriculum areas staff work in to reflect their skill set, so if an individual member of staff is, for example, skilled in art or autism, s/he will provide support in that area. The majority of staff come to college without related qualifications and experience. New staff undertake a full Level 2 course initially and then progress onto a full Level 3 in supporting people with learning difficulties and or disabilities run by the college. The ALS manager noted that qualifications do not adequately cover all the key areas of knowledge and understanding necessary, and typically require supplementation. In practice, the training LSAs at

Weston College receive is much broader and more comprehensive than is reflected in the awards staff gain, and in particular involves a specific focus on the development of independence.

In addition to level 2 and 3 qualifications in learning support, and ongoing CPD, the college has developed a Foundation Degree in Inclusive practice, to which staff can progress. The Foundation Degree is practice based, and enables participants to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding within the context of their everyday work and experience. This is a full time 2 year programme delivered in the classroom 1 day per week, with professional practice being observed through the working week. Participants have the option to convert to a BA Hons, if a third year is undertaken. Specialist Support Instructors complete this course, which is also open to staff from other organisations. As the name implies, the "Specialist Support Instructor" has a specific area of specialism. This might for example be autistic spectrum condition, dyslexia, visual impairment, hearing impairment, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or mental health.

The Specialist Support Instructors will provide specialist assessment and guidance to, and about, learners from the point of referral onwards, undertaking observations, reading related documents, and providing guidance to delivery staff about how best to meet the learner's needs. This is a central aspect of the role - although the Specialist Support Instructor may do some in class support, the bulk of their work is around supporting tutors to work effectively with learners, and also working directly with the learner to develop strategies to support their learning. This is a highly effective and innovative approach to providing support, which promotes effective partnership arrangements between tutors and LSAs, and targets specialist support effectively. Not only does it result in significantly improved achievements for learners but it is also highly efficient, making the best use of experienced and talented staff to maximise learning and develop inclusive teaching practice. The college is clear that that the initial costs of this commitment to training, are recouped because of the associated benefits in both retention and achievement. The quality of support ensures that learners are given the opportunity to be as independent as possible. By supporting tutors to adopt strategies and approaches which meet needs, for example, such as making use of assistive technology, or adjusting delivery style, learners are able to access the curriculum with less "physical support". As a result the support costs typically reduce over time, effectively preparing learners for life beyond college, and in many case, into higher education.

In the example of Weston College, the role of the Specialist Support Instructor, is focused on the provision of specialist knowledge and guidance to support tutors to work effectively with learners. The case study below is from Farleigh FE College (FFEC). Although FFEC is an independent specialist college (ISC), it is clear that its

model of support for learners with autistic spectrum conditions is a very effective one, which could usefully be applied in a range of contexts and arguably for learners with a wide range of needs. This case study also illustrates the importance of high quality training in developing the specialist skills, knowledge and understanding to effectively support learners, and the central role of the LSA in facilitating learning.

Farleigh FE College –how specialist LSAs support learners with autistic spectrum conditions to access mainstream provision.

FFEC is an ISC located in Frome, for students aged 16 to 19 plus with Asperger's Syndrome and autistic spectrum conditions. It was judged to be good in all areas when inspected by Ofsted in 2010. The student population at FFEC is diverse, in terms of both ability and interests and the vast majority of learners have previously attended special schools or experienced difficulty at mainstream schools or colleges. Approximately a third of leavers successfully go on to university.

The college is in many respects an unusual specialist provider, in that for the majority of learners, the bulk of their formal learning takes place in mainstream colleges, with support from highly trained learning support staff provided by FFEC. The college has well established partnerships with Wiltshire, City of Bath and Strode Colleges of Further Education which enable it to provide a greater breadth of curriculum options than it could realistically offer as a single provider. This model of providing specialist learning support to enable learners to sustain mainstream placements is underpinned by the college's commitment and innovative approach to training and development.

In recruiting LSAs, the college does not require specific qualifications, as it provides in depth training on appointment. Typically, it is looking for personality characteristics such as the ability to stay calm, be patient, receive and respond positively to training and work effectively with young people, characteristics which chime well with those identified above by learners. FFEC is part of Priory Education Services. The college has successfully overcome barriers to training by blending face to face training with an effective online training service, "Foundations for Growth", developed by the parent organisation. This delivers a significant amount of the college's training, and in addition, enables the college to monitor all aspects of training. It is interesting to note it also featured positively in the online questionnaire responses, with one LSA commenting. "*Foundations for Growth is a very good and interesting e-learning facility. Unfortunately it is not recognised outside of PRIORY.*"

Staff are allocated specific time to undertake it and the colleges has systems to enable staff to access it from home. The college has also produced a DVD to provide training for

LSAs in relation to supporting the development of learners' independence skills. As noted elsewhere in this report, it is perhaps the value which is ascribed to LSAs which is most central to supporting their effectiveness, not only in determining for example, access to training, but more importantly, recognising the value of the role. As the Principal from Farleigh College commented, when speaking of the contribution of LSAs in his college:

> *"LSAs are such an integral part of what we do...anything we can do to promote that role and recognise the complexities entailed in it is worthwhile"*

The on line training service "Foundations for Growth", was praised by inspectors, when Farleigh College Swindon was inspected in January 2010.

> *"Excellent use is made of the parent company's e-learning portal to provide external and in-house training to ensure that staff are well equipped to teach and support learners appropriately ....The take up of learning is very high. The system is used effectively to record the extensive external training that staff undertake and provides easy monitoring of the progress of staff against timely targets." Ofsted 2010[9]*

The impact of this training on learning support is demonstrated in the subsequent comment, taken from the same inspection report:

> *"Individual support for independent living skills and support in the classroom is good. Learners receive well-informed and constructive support from key workers and learning support workers, which contributes substantially to their progress."*

Whilst valued by the organisation and clearly impacting positively on quality, "Foundation for Growth" is not recognised nationally. The need for a formal qualifications framework into which nationally recognised professional qualifications can be set is urgent. However in taking forward a national framework it is important that those providers who already have their own highly effective bespoke programmes are accommodated within the new national framework and the highly contextualised training that already exists and that the evidence suggests LSAs really value is not lost.

The Range and Effectiveness of Continuous Professional Development

The challenge LSAs and managers reported in identifying appropriate qualifications, also extended to finding continuous professional development that is relevant to the LSA role. As with induction, respondents indicate that CPD typically focus on the mandatory training and there is insufficient focus on supporting teaching and

---

[9] Ofsted Farleigh College Swindon Inspection Report published February 2010

learning. As a consequence, some providers have developed their own training packages and this is often relates to the specific needs of learners in their college.

The field research indicates that some providers do provide a broad range of CPD opportunities for LSAs. In the South West, the South West Workforce Development Partnership (SWWDP) has created an extensive CPD framework designed to share effective practice across the further education sector. This framework has been accredited by Open College Network South West (OCNSW) and the units are mapped against the NOS.

Practice across the sector is however variable. There appears to be no mandatory aspects of CPD for LSAs, nor is there any entitlement to training. There is limited evidence of systematic training relating to how to support teaching and learning and /or to promote independence, which are arguably the central elements of the role.

The following section, which explores the views and experiences of LSAs with regard to training opportunities, illustrates the key themes.

LSAs views and experiences of CPD

- One of the key findings from the research was that CPD for LSAs does not always include sufficient emphasis on how to support teaching and learning. In both interviews and within the survey, respondents typically highlighted the need for specialist training, and the impact of specific disabilities on learning.

- Where training was provided, this was often focussed on compliance related issues, and yet, when asked about gaps in training and/or training needs, the main need LSAs identified related to specialist training to support them to work more effectively with learners. The following comment is typical:

"I would like more specialist training in areas of behaviour issues and health conditions/diagnosis that could impact on learning and how to support the learner most effectively"

The impact of well trained staff with specialist skills and understanding is clearly reflected in the following extract from an Ofsted report for Thornbeck College, an ISC for learners with autistic spectrum conditions, judged outstanding in September 2009;

"Staff are skilled in meeting the individual needs of learners with ASC; they use their expertise well and regularly share best practice. Support assistants are effectively informed about their role. Outcomes from regular lesson observations, validated by

external specialist providers, demonstrate that teaching and learning have consistently improved over time." Ofsted 2009[10]

- LSAs perceive that their role is not always fully understood by teachers and this can be problematic

- A training need to support effective joint working was identified as common to both teachers and LSAs. There is value, not only in the focus of training, but that it is undertaken jointly, to promote shared understanding and effective joint working.

Joint Training and Development

Both LSAs and their managers identify the relationship between the LSA and teachers as being very important .There was, however limited evidence that joint training is a widespread feature of provision across the sector. Little formal joint training for LSAs and teachers takes place in relation to their respective roles and responsibilities, although the value of this is widely recognised in the literature.

> *"Central to the success of professional development was the fostering of a collaborative culture where there was a strong emphasis on working together across the organisation to share good practice and to develop problem solving strategies to improve teaching and learning. Thus, effective professional development was likely to have a direct relationship to classroom practice and to build on LSAs existing skills and experience. Opportunities for reflection on practice, self appraisal and the sharing of ideas, expertise and knowledge with others would build and foster a culture that was essentially focused on developing and improving learning. Ofsted (2010)[11] confirmed that in effective organisations the ethos was one where teachers and support staff were determined to learn from and work with each others."* Faraday 2010

Although the literature review in the lifelong learning sector is limited, the experience in schools sector is that teaching assistants learned about supporting learners 'on the job' and in consultation and collaboration with other members of the organisations support networks. The experience reported in the literature from schools correlates well with the findings from LSAs in the research undertaken for this project. The common theme was their concerns about having limited time for preparation and joint planning with teachers, which often left them feeling unprepared. The importance of joint training with teachers and allocated time for joint working in general, was a key theme:

> *"Any amount of training cannot suffice without the opportunity to discuss situations with somebody more experienced who can advise on a 'best approach' and this is not always possible due to time constraints."*

---

[10] Ofsted Thornbeck Inspection Report published October 2009
[11] Ofsted (2010) op cit

Many comments alluded to the lack of time allocated for teachers and LSAs to work together. Very often, LSA time is only allocated to direct support, leaving little if any time for LSAs and teaches to liaise. Involving LSAs in a dialogue about lesson planning, for example, would not only inform the LSA of the session objectives and the design of the session, but would ensure that they were aware of their proposed deployment and the nature of the support they were to provide. The value of shared understanding and joint planning was recently identified in an inspection report for Beaumont College, an ISC, judged outstanding in December 2009.

> *"Rigorous transdisciplinary assessment processes successfully inform the detailed person-centred learning plans.....Teachers provide very clear guidance for learning support workers and direct their work well."* [12]

Increased opportunities for both to engage in shared professional development programmes, was also identified as an activity that would enhance the effectiveness of the support team.

Training for teachers

In addition to an identified need for joint training, there was considerable evidence of the need for support and professional development for the teachers with whom LSA's will be working. Many of the LSAs interviewed, indicated that they felt that teachers did not fully understand or appreciate their role. Comments included:

> *"they don't understand the intensity of support"*

> *"teachers can think an LSA presence is an imposition and don't always understand why they are there"*

> *"teachers need to be aware of the range of disabilities and often they are not"*

LSAs reported that they sometimes find it difficult to explain to tutors why they are standing back and noted that for some learners, particularly for those who have mental health issues, the mere presence of an LSA is a stabilising presence and a crucial part of the support process.

The need to provide training to support teachers to work effectively with LSAs was also identified by managers and senior, with one commenting

> *"There is a need for more effective work with teaching staff. Teaching staff don't always manage support staff well – it can be quite daunting. They (LSAs) have got the skills and can add to the lesson."*

The need for teachers to receive effective training in the deployment of support staff is also highlighted in circumstances where LSAs take on too much responsibility.

---

[12] Ofsted Beaumont College Inspection Report Published January 2010

"LSAs are sometimes left with too much responsibility. They are left to record learning - highly technical skills – many record only what they see, which is activity only, already in the lesson plan. I can't criticise them for that. It's not their role, they are given too much responsibility."

This further underlines the need for joint training to ensure there is clarity across the organisation about roles and responsibilities.

Personal Qualities and Values

A key finding from the learners' views was that even above skills, knowledge and understanding, what learners really valued were the personal qualities which individuals bring to their role. They want to be treated with respect, and be supported by someone who has the personal qualities to listen, be calm and patient, and communicate effectively. A number of managers, when asked what they were looking for when recruiting LSAs, similarly identified personal qualities as a key factor.

Perhaps not surprisingly, when LSAs were asked about the skills and training they felt it was important for their managers to receive, in order for them to be able to do their job effectively, their responses again focussed on the importance of having and developing good interpersonal skills.

This finding presents a significant challenge in terms of training. Knowledge and skills can be taught, but teaching the behaviours which characterise high quality interactions between individuals is arguably more problematic. One organisation has endeavoured to address this challenge and to formalise it within both the recruitment and CPD processes. The case study below illustrates their approach.

Great Interactions

MacIntyre, a national charity working with young people with learning disabilities and autism, has recently developed a new approach to workforce recruitment and development. Their aim was to try and answer the questions;

"What makes a great support worker? How does it feel to be supported by someone who is making a positive impact on your life; giving attention to the small personal details that really matter, each day, every day"?

MacIntyre was keen to identify what it is about the most effective support workers that set them apart from others? The workers were typically described by their managers and colleagues as "naturals", because they seemed to know instinctively how to work in a way that maximised each person's independence. Internal quality data suggested that support staff without these qualities often defaulted to an approach which could be

characterised as "naïve parenting"; interpreting their support role as parental and protective, rather than enabling the young person to become more independent.

They concluded there is something implicit in the way an effective or "natural" LSA works with an individual which impacts positively on the quality of the individual's experience, and it was this Macintyre were keen to capture and develop in all staff. The key challenge was "*What makes a "natural?' How can we de-construct the ways in which "naturals" work and de-mystify good support behaviours?*"

To address this, Macintyre initially worked in partnership with a specialist Human Resource consultancy, to construct a personality profile for "naturals", the outcomes of which were then used to create a competency based framework for recruitment.

An analysis of video clips was then undertaken, to identify the main behaviours that lead to great interactions. This resulted in the identification of a range of skilled behaviours which included observation, responsiveness, reflection, personalised communication, appropriate eye contact, touch, posture, good listening, and being creative. These skilled behaviours have been incorporated into interactive learning tools and are taught to all staff as part of their induction and ongoing training. They have also been embedded into a "Great Interactions" policy which underpins the approach to communication across the organisation, and is supported by designated "Champions" and a comprehensive 4 day training programme.

The values which underpin approaches are arguably implicit in the personal qualities which characterise high quality interactions, and yet it is worth noting that a focus on core values is often lacking in training. When asked about the priorities for training for the LSAs in her organisation, an LSA manager made the following comment, which illustrates beautifully the importance of values in supporting effective practice:

> "*It's about ethos and attitude- we have a little way to go in seeing the learner as an independent autonomous person, and having genuine respect for them and what they have to say".*

Access and barriers to training

A key factor, in terms of access to training appears to be related to the employment status of the individual. This is particularly worthy of note, since, as previously identified, the sample suggest that a significant number of staff are on hourly contracts. The findings from both LSAs and managers suggest a clear difference in the quality of experience for staff who are permanently employed by providers, who typically reported good access to training and felt well supported by managers, and those who were not. Whilst a small proportion of staff contracted by the hour reported they were paid to attend training, the vast majority were not, and this had a

huge impact on up take. Respondents also indicated that agency staff do not typically attend training. As well as employment status, broader issues relating to the status of LSAs within the organisation appears to present barriers to access. One LSA commented that training and development was not available for LSAs because they were not teaching staff. A group of LSAs in another college said they were not allowed to have the same training as teachers:

> *"teachers had training recently on Profound and Complex Needs. We asked if we could go but were told the training was only for teachers and yet we work with profound and complex learners every day".*

Another focus group reported;

> *"there is lots (of training) for curriculum staff but not so for LSAs since they are business support staff and they don't get training".*

Given the small sample survey of the research there has to be some caution about the degree to which this is representative of the sector as a whole but it is indicative of findings more generally and the wider literature in the schools sector

My college can release me, but not my LSAs

The comment above is a quote from a college Principal, and it illuminates perfectly the fundamental barrier to training and development for LSAs. Responses from both interviewees in focus groups, and survey respondents, overwhelmingly demonstrate that the single biggest barrier to development for LSAs is related to time. The barriers identified revolved almost entirely around LSAs not being able to be released for training because of hourly contracts, the lack of time available for training and the lack of training opportunities linked to their low status within the organisation. In addition, as the quote above illustrates, these difficulties are also compounded by the fact that organisations struggle to cover LSAs – they simply find it hard to release them. As one Local Authority Area wide coordinator put it, when referring to some Foundation Learning Training which was being provided for LSAs within the authority:

> *"We provide training for free, and even then, providers won't always release them. They say they are short staffed, so they won't let them come. Take this course, we haven't got as many people seconded to it as we would like. The problem is, they haven't got anyone to take their place if they let LSAs come, so they can't release them even when we pay."*

Effective development methods and approaches

The field research and literature supports the importance and value of the role of the LSA. It also points to a diverse and fragmented workforce where access to development is variable and where time and resources are limited. In this context,

Learning Support Assistants were asked to draw on their experience of training and development to identify approaches which they feel are, or would be, most effective in supporting their development. The most popular are summarised below;

- Training incorporated into, and reflected by, their working practice and not just be theory based.

- Shadowing, mentoring and peer observation

- Meeting others doing the same role to share experiences and learn from each other

- Group interactive learning

- e-learning for some elements but not for all the training

- Tap into the skills, understanding and knowledge and experience that LSAs have

Whilst a blended approach is clearly supported, it is interesting to note that these responses overwhelmingly support context based training which is grounded in practice, involves liaising with others doing the same role, and includes joint training with tutors. This conclusion is also supported by the literature. The everyday experience of LSAs reported in the research is often, however, quite different. Limited evidence was found to support the use of shadowing or mentoring outside induction, and yet this features strongly as a valued approach, and as reported previously, a number of LSAs reported they had limited access to any form of training as a result of their contractual arrangements.

Implications for Effective Practice in CPD

A number of key factors emerge from both the research and the literature review which support effective training and development for LSAs. These included:

- An organisational culture whose values and ethos promotes inclusion at all levels.
- The inclusion of LSAs in the process of developing programmes for professional development.
- The provision of opportunities for teachers and LSAs to work together to plan, prepare and review learning.
- A clear emphasis on the primary functions of supporting teaching and learning and promoting independence in training for LSAs
- Effective training for teachers to prepare them to work effectively with LSAs.

One particularly strong finding was that training alone was unlikely to produce the benefits necessary if it was not located within a consistent and coherent management structure. Without a whole organisational approach, with clearly

identified roles and responsibilities training is likely to be poorly targeted and lack impact. Indeed this lack of relevance of some professional development programmes was identified as a common barrier. As an interviewee suggested, quite simply, "*where there is a problem with the relevance of the training for LSAs, include LSAs in the team.*"

The following case exemplifies such a holistic approach. In addition, it provides a useful practice based example of how one organisation, Coventry Adult Services working in collaboration with some tutors from a University, was able to develop a highly relevant customised programme derived entirely from LSAs' and teachers' identified needs.

Coventry Adult Services- Developing customised training from identified needs

Coventry Adult Services approached a group of consultants from the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education for support to develop a training programme for its teachers and learning support staff. The external team began by carrying out a series of observations and discussions with staff and managers to identify priorities and then together they drew up an action plan. A delivery team of 3 worked with Coventry staff to develop the training aspects of the plan. The training programme spanned two years, with joint termly sessions for tutors and LSAs.

The delivery team recognised the value of developing a shared agenda for the training, and so began by inviting staff to take part in a student shadowing exercise to help shape the course content. These student shadowing observations were mostly undertaken by LSAs, an experience which they found to be very empowering. The outcomes from the shadowing observations resulted in the following content areas being identified:

The importance of valuing each other's knowledge & expertise

Collaboration and team working

Role descriptions

Pedagogy and support for learning

Communication (including the importance of augmentative & alternative communication strategies , the communication environment, development & use of communication dictionaries & passports)

Person centredness, and person centred plans

The role of LSAs in the management of break times / outside formal class sessions

---

One of the main aims of the training was to foster an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in which LSAs and tutors felt free to exchange their personal views and experiences. Implicit within the training, was a recognition of the value of learning support staff in contributing to enhanced learning opportunities. An innovative approach was developed to gather LSAs' views about what supported them to do their job effectively and what approaches could further collaborative working and planning.

Both LSAs and tutors were asked individually and anonymously to complete the following memo:

MEMO[13]

To my classroom partner

What I think works really well about our work together is…………..

I think you are really good at………………

What I think we should do to make sure all our individual knowledge and expertise is used well is……………..

Our planning would be more effective if…………………

When we reflect about our work together it would be better if……………

Our training and professional development would be improved if………..

---

[13]Adapted from original text in Balshaw, M. (1991) *Help in the Classroom* London ; Fulton

MEMO

To the leadership team

The best thing about working in the service is………………

I would be really pleased if……………………

The completed memos were then shared anonymously with mixed teams, who worked in small groups to discuss their reactions to the memos and to begin to identify responses and strategies to resolve the issues described. The whole staff team then agreed ideas and strategies at course, centre and whole service levels, in relation to both valuing the knowledge and expertise of LSAs, and promoting team work.

The approach was highly effective. The use of anonymous memos enabled staff to feel confident about identifying the issues which they felt affected their everyday work. The culture of the organisation, in facilitating this, is important- it does require a training environment where there is trust, confidence, and safety. The memos identified a range of practical issues such as how to manage support staff employed by learners through direct payment, uncertainty about the role and expectations of LSAs in assessment and lack of clarity about their role in general. By identifying practical stumbling blocks to effective working, the external team were able to work with the staff team to identify their training needs and take practical steps to address issues. For example, the local authority had a standard job description, which in practice, did not adequately reflect the actual or perceived roles of the learning support assistants. As part of the training activity, people developed their own *role* descriptions, a process which clearly demonstrated that LSAs wanted their specific skills included, as well as their more generic roles. For instance, one individual wanted her job description to recognise her role in interpreting for some students from ethnic minorities. This process not only produced more accurate role descriptions, but it substantially enhanced the value and recognition attached to LSAs' knowledge and expertise and provided a tangible mechanism for acknowledging it.

During formative evaluations staff reported that positive strides had been made in improving collaborative working.

The case for E-learning

As part of the research both within the focus groups and the survey responses respondents were asked for their experiences and attitudes to the use of e-learning as a development tool

E-learning is a potentially useful tool for CPD although it was not that widely used - our survey found slightly more than a third of LSAs and less than a half of LSA managers had experienced e-learning. The benefits were in offering convenience, greater flexibility and the opportunity to work at your own pace, although some drawbacks were also reported. The effectiveness of e-learning approaches depended on access to the IT infrastructure and skills in using technology and some people prefer more interaction and experiential methods. There were some interesting and innovative developments[14] and there was support for these being encouraged and disseminated.

The mixed response to e-learning reflects the need to differentiate information and knowledge. It also partly reflects the relatively recent implementation of the technology and the inexperience and lack of confidence amongst some staff in using it. It may not be a platform that can deliver the more nuanced aspects of knowledge and understanding implicit in supporting learning for those with learning difficulties but where it was well thought through staff reported it as effective. One provider has developed an e-learning module that provides an introduction to the role of the LSA which was very effective in the way it set the information within a context which promoted the values and personal qualities necessary to deliver effective support.

Summary

It is clear, both from the literature review and the field research undertaken, that there are a number of factors which influence both the access to and effectiveness of training and development activities for LSAs in the lifelong learning context. There is a significant need to improve the flow of information, support opportunities for joint training and development and promote a culture which recognizes values and supports the role and contribution of LSAs to enhanced learning opportunities.

There is also a strong message about the need to include LSAs in the development of any programmes of training or professional development.

---

[14] Enhancement of Learning Support; Opportunities and Resources, Faraday S (2010)

Section 4: Leadership and Management

It is not surprising that the research confirms that arguably the single most important variable in the promoting the effectiveness of learning support and the associated professional development activities is the values, ethos and management of the organisation. In the best organisations, the management culture reinforces the value and status of LSAs and this improves outcomes for learners.

Literature from the schools sector supports the finding that encouraging a climate which allows learning support staff to become confident and exercise their own judgment is crucial. How LSAs are valued is a fundamental management issue and impacts directly on the impact of any training. In describing effective practice, Ofsted (2010)[15] confirmed the importance of a supportive professional culture that encouraged all staff to have high expectations of their work and to be held accountable for individuals' learning. This meant that leaders needed to ensure that all the staff had clear professional status, were well trained and were deployed effectively. The lack of value attributed to the role, will have implications not only for the confidence and self esteem of the LSA workforce, but, as one senior manager pointed out, also for those they support.

> *"If LSAs are seen to be marginalised or undervalued, the learners they work with will be too. It is an integral part of the ethos."*

How LSAs are valued is arguably as significant as how they are deployed, and the main point of contact through which they experience this is through their direct line management. The next section will therefore focus on the role and development of LSA managers.

Training and professional development for managers of LSAs

A key finding is that training to support LSA managers in their role is underdeveloped generally. The majority of those interviewed and surveyed indicated that they had received little, or no, induction training to their role. To illustrate this point the following comments were typical:

"I learnt on the job"

The same applied to ongoing CPD. Typically training offered focused on issues such as funding and inspection, but there was little related to the specific role of managing learning support. The comments indicated that this is an area where managers feel more training would be beneficial.

"Same as everyone else with no real professional development opportunities"

---

[15] Ofsted (2010) op cit

"This is a weak area at the moment"

"Not had any - training needed in managing people"

It is perhaps the comment which follows, which is most significant:

> *"LSA managers are not seen as managers, rather as coordinators, therefore do not have the same opportunities".*

It is this perception, by managers and by those around them, which is so important in influencing a culture that can actively promote change and ongoing improvement. It is clear that if the aim is to engage LSA managers in this process then there is a much greater need for consistent access to appropriate training. In the schools sector, the value of middle managers is acknowledged in programmes such as "Leading from the Middle" which are offered by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). Findings from the field research would suggest that LSA managers, as a group, have not participated sufficiently in management development activities of this type, and yet the research clearly points to the potential benefits of this.

Where managers do receive management training it is often concentrated within the domain of functional tasks such as performance management and administration. What appears to be lacking is training on the central role of the manager in creating an environment which is self reflective and improving. The key to achieving a culture of continuous improvement is at least in part related to how managers perceive the role of management. The following, very illuminating quote, effectively illustrates this

"The problem is not seeing themselves as managers of change, but as administrators and trouble-shooters. They need to understand what brings about change and to have strategies to help them do it"

The use of performance management and improvement

The field research indicates that the formal observation of learning support is widespread. This is typically undertaken as part of the college formal observation of teaching and learning, although a number of providers specifically focus observations on learning support. The following case studies provides extracts from the documentation one specialist college has developed, in consultation with its GFE partners, to support this process.

Farleigh FE College- Observation of Learning Support Staff

Farleigh FE College (FFEC) is located in Frome, for students aged 16 to 19 plus with Asperger's Syndrome and autistic spectrum conditions. Although it is a specialist college, the majority of its learners undertake the bulk of their formal learning in mainstream colleges, with support from highly trained learning support staff provided by FFEC. The college has well established partnership with Wiltshire, City of Bath and Strode Colleges of Further Education to facilitate this. The role of LSAs is to support learners from the college to access mainstream provision, and to provide specialist knowledge and information to tutors to enable them to work effectively with learners on the autistic spectrum.

The introductory guidance produced by the college, to support the observation of LSAs recognises both the complexity of the role and the contextual factors which might influence an LSA's ability to undertake it.

"Learning support is a complex and demanding role. Among the qualities expected of LSAs are: flexibility, patience, intuition, resourcefulness, persistence….. Their effectiveness is dependent on a range of interacting factors, which are not always within the LSA's control, e.g. the learner's willingness to accept support, the lecturer's advice, guidance and skill in using support, the learning environment, including the conduct of other learners."

The documentation also recognises that the individual needs of the learner will determine the nature and level of support provided. The guidance produced has been developed with the involvement of experienced senior LSAs, and includes contributions from mainstream lecturers. The resulting documentation is;

"intended to help us all agree the qualities, which contribute towards making our support effective. It is also part of us striving to be the outstandingly good provision we aim to be."

Learning support staff are observed once a year. The guidance to support this process provides general guidelines for LSAs about supporting learners in FE colleges, as well as criteria for judgements. These include:

attentiveness to the learner's support needs

ability to blend with/contribute to the group

managing the learner's anxiety

being able to balance support with developing self reliance

understanding the learner's own version of Asperger Syndrome

It is interesting to note that comments from mainstream tutors reiterate the importance of the inclusive approach identified as effective practice within the literature review undertaken in support of this project (Faraday 2010);

"working solely on a 1-1 basis is not always helpful to their named student's learning, it can in fact hinder rather than help. It's best to watch the whole group and interact with the whole group. The class dynamics are greatly improved and this helps Farleigh students to develop greater independence. It also means that they are not seen to be 'special or singled out'.

The guidance produced includes practical tips and pointers for LSAs around preparing the leaner and liaising with lecturers. For example;

Ensure beforehand that your student is prepared – Let him/her know that you will be supporting them that day – ask them what they've been covering in class, check that they have the right equipment and that they leave the base room etc… for the lesson in good time! Warn them at least 10 minutes before they have to leave – this should minimise any anxiety and give them a chance to check emails, finish games etc…

A copy of the forms used can be found in Annex 16.

Whilst LSA observation appears widespread, there was less evidence that its impact on outcomes for learners was evaluated and reviewed, or that findings were used systematically to support effective practice.Given the evidence gathered so far about the variability in access to training, particularly for hourly paid and agency staff, it is clear that the link between observation and training to support development is at best inconsistent, and, our findings would suggest, overall, underdeveloped across the sector.

Summary

The role of leadership and management is central to the effective development of learning support staff. Organisational values and ethos are key in shaping not only access to training, but impact and effectiveness. To achieve this managers of LSAs need access to a wider range of professional development, beyond task and coordination, to better enable them to fulfill their role in leading change and improvement.

Section 5: Networks and Partnerships

In addition to exploring the relationships between LSAs and teachers, and opportunities within organisations for staff to network, the field research also explored the networks which exist at national, regional and local level. The previous section has established that the provision of joint training for teachers and LSAs to work together is limited, and that, whilst LSAs value opportunities to mix with others doing the same role, lack of regular access to training and the impact of hourly and agency contracts inhibits their ability to do so. The next section outlines what learning support assistants, their managers, and member organisations had to say about networks.

The most significant finding is that although networks do exist, these do not typically operate at LSA level. The majority of related networks at national level are attended by senior managers and principals, and at local and regional level are attended by LSA managers. The field research suggests that access to these is patchy, with comments from LSA managers including "I am not in a networks that compares practice" and "There are no local networks which share best practice" Although, were they exist, the value of these is clear, the potential for access and rolling out training direct to LSAs is less so. The survey data in particular, suggests that opportunities for LSAs to network even within their own organisation were often limited. One LSA for example, commented;

> "*I am not aware of any local or regional networks. My only (brief) contact would be with Agency workers and occasionally another LSA from a different branch of the same company*"

There are examples of active regional networks that include FE colleges and Independent Specialist Colleges but all of them are for learning support managers and not LSAs. A network of Learner Support Managers has also been established in the South West. This has been running for 3 years and is attended by at least 10 FE colleges and one sixth form college, although it does not currently include ISC representation. It meets once a term and is clearly valued by those attending. More than one manager spoke positively of the network meetings as an important means of reducing their own sense of isolation by providing a support network of like minded colleagues:

> "*It is really good to talk to people doing the same role and to have the opportunity to share practice.*"

In addition to the opportunity to meet formally, the networks have fostered more personal connections to support the sharing of practice and information on a more informal level. One learning support manager commented

> *"it (the network) could be used to deliver training but challenge is to get LSAs together in one place".*

The geographical size of a region can limit attendance for managers let alone LSAs. One manager said that he had to think carefully about the value of travelling two hours each way for a network meeting even if it is once a term. "I am not going to go from Cheshire to Blackpool for a 2 hour meeting" Where providers have teamed up with other organisations to share expertise and experience, this is reported to have worked well and is something managers would like to see more. The following comment perfectly illustrates the value of more locally based training:

> *"I would like to see more needs based local training, some kind of programme put together with other colleges, being able to learn/link into different environments with other people doing the same job. Many staff won't have come in with a lot of experience, so if we are not careful, what they know and think will be based solely on their own college. What they need is wider experience. Do it locally.*

Local Authorities

Networks tend not to be formally linked to Local Authority (LA) structures. As a result, typically they do not have any formal accountability or reporting and communication lines to LAs through which to inform LA planning or strategy in relation to 14-19 (25) year old learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Some LAs are developing holistic 14 – 19 (25) strategies and services for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities that incorporate, develop and support training for LSAs currently in the post 16 sector. Newham LA for example has provided training in Foundation Learning for its TAs and LSAs. Sheffield LA, with support from Yorkshire and Humber LSC Learning for Living and Work Pathfinder Funding, is undertaking a three year project aimed at developing cohesive 14-25 provision for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities across the city called *My City Learning*.

The field research suggests that networks within LAs are typically underdeveloped at FE level at present. However, as the legislative changes begin to take effect and the context for organising and funding FE moves from the Learning and Skills Council to Local Authorities, it is clear that LAs could be a very relevant means of developing local networks, particularly given what our findings are telling us about the value of "local".

Whilst it has not been possible to research this fully within the scope of this project , it is clear that there are a number of national and regional professional organisations which have the potential to support the delivery of LSA training and development. These include the Professional Development Centres, which predominantly support

the training and development of staff in Skills for life and teacher training qualifications, the Karten Alpha CTEC Trust, and the National Association of Disability Practitioners[16] (NADP) for disability and support staff in Further and Higher Education. The following case study illustrates how one such organisation, the CETT for Inclusive Learning, has actively supported and promoted networks and the sharing of best practice between organisations in the North East.

Centre for Excellence for Inclusive Learning

The Centre for Excellence for Inclusive Learning (CETTIL) is one of eleven national Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Training (CETT), set up as part of a government initiative three years ago. CETTIL is a partnership organisation, whose lead partner is Northumbria University. Its members represent a wide range of providers including higher education, general further education, specialist colleges, adult and community education, work based learning and offender learning.

 Unlike many other CETTs, the focus has always been around the inclusion agenda, and in particular working with learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities. It has actively promoted networks and the sharing of best practice between organisations. A number of interviewees for example, cited the value of training facilitated through CETTIL around supporting teaching and learning. The CETT in many respects sees its role to act as a ""networker / facilitator", putting organisations who have training and development needs in touch with other organisations with skills and resources in that area. In addition to the formal connections made through training events and so on, it has also facilitated enhanced relationships between providers to such an extent that the principal of one organisation was willing to attend a partnership meeting with Ofsted inspectors to support the inspection process for another college. It has also developed a number of on-line frameworks and guidance to support organisations to share best practice, such as "Tips and Hints" and "Case Studies". These can be accessed by following the hyperlink www.cettil.org.uk

---

[16] http://nadp-uk.org/

Section 6: Recommendations

Introduction

The recommendations are in two sections. There are three key recommendations and twelve further recommendations.

The conclusions from the project research illustrate that the biggest impact is likely to be made from interventions which can be broadly described as "systemic". Therefore, the recommendations are concerned with organisational development and the systems in which LSAs work, rather than being directed at individuals.

Making the System "Leaner"

The recommendations all address organisational development issues, and can perhaps be best understood as an approach which is aimed at making the delivery system leaner. "Lean" in this context refers specifically to a system that focuses activity on the creation of value for the end customer and the elimination of waste, and is an operational and organisational management approach initially developed in industry.[17] There has been considerable interest in adapting "lean methodologies" to service delivery across the public sector, but in the context of this project it is not intended to offer a blueprint or tool, but only a way of framing the issue.

Very often the approach to improvement is to "push" learning solutions at organisations and individuals and hope they add value to learners. The "lean" alternative is an approach where ultimately the needs of learners **pull** learning and development support through a chain of value adding activities which personalises workforce development. To achieve this, organisations need to understand what the customer wants (the learner), create a flow of operational activities that can deliver effectively against that so reducing wasted effort and improving outcomes.

The diagram below uses an adaptation of a value chain approach[18] to illustrate this.

---

[17] Womack, J P, Jones, D T, Roos, D (1990), *The Machine that Changed the World,* Harper Perennial*,* New York

[18] Porter, M (1985), Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance.

"The purpose of the system is personalised and inclusive learning"

A Chain of Value Adding Activities Personalising Workforce Development

Commissioners

Learner

Individual Learning Plans and Support Plans create a Profile of Needs

LSAs Professional Development Plans reflect Individual Learning Plans jointly identified and negotiated

Internal learning and development activities

External Training Providers

PULL

Each customer in the chain Pulls Value based on demands

NOS / Qualifications
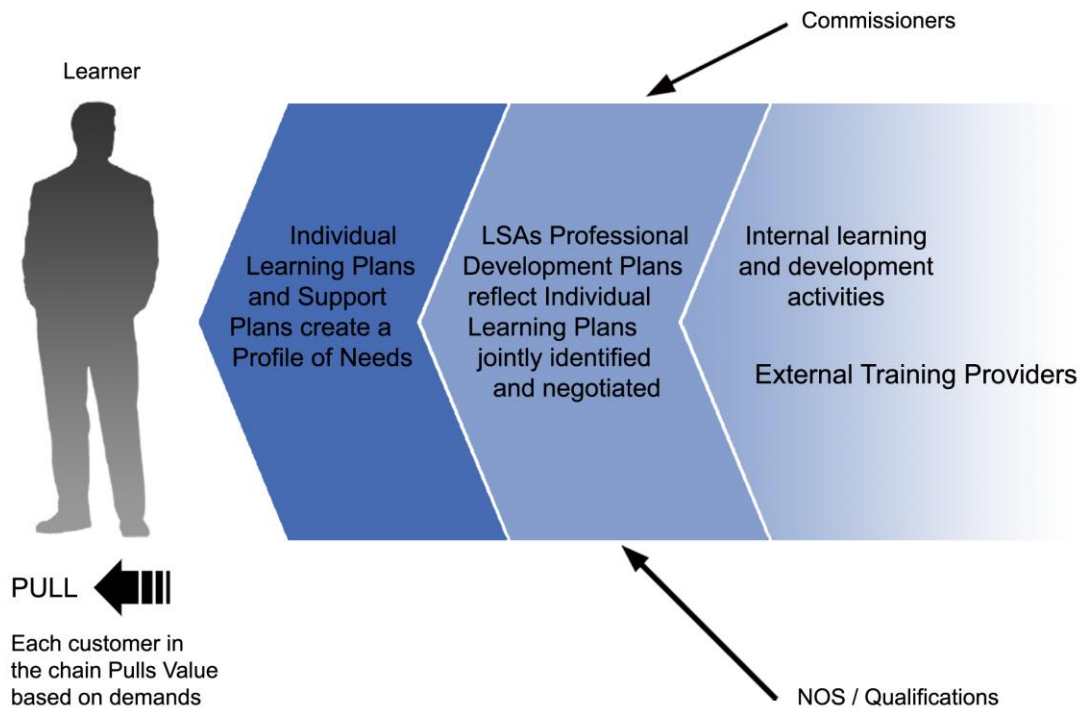
In the context of LSAs, the planning of individualised learning linked very directly and explicitly to the needs of the people being supported is the key mechanism for driving personalised workforce solutions. Focusing workforce development more explicitly to identified professional development needs generated by the needs of people being supported should create more value for learners, individual staff, and organisations.

The issue that arises with LSAs from the literature and the research is that there is a lot of very positive workforce development activity taking place across the sector with commitment of considerable time and resources. However better alignment of tasks and activities using a learner focus, combined with leaner systems and processes can improve impact and value.

There are three components to making the system leaner.

- Facilitate better information flow
- Generate opportunities for more targeted context specific CPD focused on the personalised needs of those being supported
- Encourage face to face communities of practice which transfer and share knowledge and good practice as well as information

This approach informs the recommendation which follow.

Recommendation 1

Develop a web based portal to provide a common location for information and resources for LSAs and their managers. This will also support the development of a collective identity for LSAs and should improve practice by supporting the sector to share information more efficiently. This is likely to involve the development of a national organising body.

The research for this project found that the system for LSAs is fragmented and unlike other professional groups within the sector there seems to be a significant deficit in sharing basic information about practice, both within organisations and between them, which is a significant constraint on sector wide improvement. The more efficient at sharing information a sector becomes, the more one would expect to see improvements in terms of learners' achievements. The rationale for sharing effective practice can best be understood from the perspective of making organisations responsive to new or relevant information and able to update their practice accordingly. The aim of this recommendation is to ensure that practice, and hence outcomes for learners, adjust to new and existing information rapidly so that for any given level of resources, both financial and human, more organisations are operating efficiently and effectively.

To be effective the research recommends that there should be a significant degree of ownership of the web portal by LSAs. For it to have value, there must be "buy in" from LSAs, and this can only be achieved if it reflects and is responsive to their needs. The research has clearly shown that the voice of LSAs is currently under represented. If the delivery of the portal is procured through an open process, the specification would need to ensure that the governance arrangements include a requirement to have oversight and advice from LSAs, and a representative sample from across the sector.

The design and functionality of the web portal could include:

- **A format modelled on a hybrid of TDA and NAPTA sites available to teaching assistants in the schools sector**

- **A facility to collate all existing research and other documentation specifically about LSAs in lifelong learning sector. It could build on the literature review in this project and commission research to address gaps.**

- **Operate with a 'reference group' or groups of LSAs to be involved in shaping all developments related to LSAs**

- **Undertake a national survey of a representative sample of LSAs to provide useful information about this valuable workforce.**

- **Be a repository of all information about training packages that have been developed and include a rating scale to enable users to leave comments, and prospective users to find out more about what is available.**

The diagram below illustrates the web portal and its possible functions.
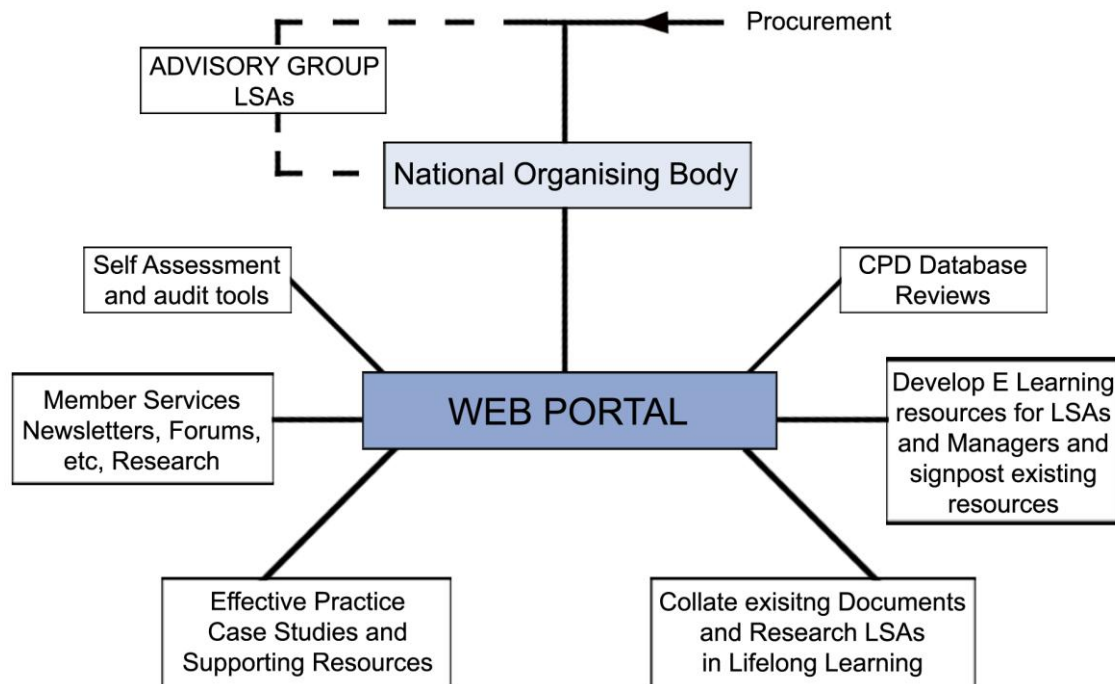
Recommendation 2

Building on effective practice, develop an approach and related resources to support the planning of customised training and professional development which is directly derived from LSAs' and teachers identified needs. This methodology is exemplified in the Coventry Adult Service case study. Consideration could then be given to wider dissemination and national rollout.

To improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of CPD activities across the sector, there needs to be a much clearer connection between the needs of the supported learners and the LSAs own development needs.

The evidence from the research illustrates that context specific CPD is in many ways as important to improving practice as formal qualifications and programmes. In some respects the ability of any organisation to be inclusive is determined by the degree to which it can respond flexibly to variations in demand. In turn this flexibility is underpinned primarily by the quality and availability of CPD activity in enabling organisations to respond effectively to learner needs. The lack of structure in CPD,

the scarcity of information and the path dependency of current practice means that it should be possible to support the system to be more responsive within existing resources both financial and human.

In the professional practice of LSAs the service is delivered at the point of interaction with the learner, "the moment of truth"[19] for the learner is all about what happens at this point. Qualifications and a proper framework are important, but qualifications are not always and everywhere the same as skills. The field research suggests that in practice many staff have to wait a considerable amount of time before funding, time or organisational structures allow them the opportunity to undertake a formal qualification. Therefore context specific CPD is as important to improving outcomes for learners as external qualifications. In recommending an approach for improvement, it is important to take into account the very real constraints on time and resources that exist and the current barriers, in particular the role, value and status of LSAs and how they are managed. Any approach must add value and be deliverable within those constraints.

It is a recommendation that significant improvement can come from a programme of organisational development which enables LSAs and their managers to understand their service delivery collaboratively and to use the knowledge they gain to improve and change. This could be achieved by developing and extending the model used in the case study with Coventry Adult Education.

As noted earlier, the success of the approach used in Coventry resides not just in the format, but in the methodology. The model actively promotes the involvement of all staff in identifying barriers to effective working and solutions to address them. The programme is one of organisational development, enabling providers to develop their capacity to identify training and development activities that will really make a difference to the quality of the provision. The programme is not prescriptive, rather it is about implementing a process which enables an organisation to align its CPD activity more closely to the identified needs of LSAs and other staff.

The research clearly demonstrates that what LSAs want is development which will better enable them to meet the very particular needs of those they support. The training they most value is that which is directly related to the skills they require in their role. In using this process, organisations can create an explicit link between workforce development and the personalised needs of each learner. The advantage of such an approach is that it creates a legacy which is sustainable beyond the life of any intervention. By focusing the efforts not on the individuals but on the organisation, the impact is greater and more long lasting. This approach broadens the definition of what is meant by training. It not only involves LSAs in identifying specific training requirements but also in identifying and solving operational issues which inhibit improvement. In the Coventry example, staff identified a problem with

---

[19] Carlson, C (1987) Moments of Truth

job descriptions. Working on more detailed descriptions of their roles within the team helped to clarify their thinking about what the role of LSA entailed.

This model addresses directly the key issues identified in this research, in that it enhances the culture of the organisation, up skills and values the role of LSAs by placing them at the heart of developments and addresses directly the challenge of providing context based CPD. It is also affordable both in terms of financial costs and time and, is an approach that should be replicable across the sector and in all contexts.

This approach has been trialed successfully with an Adult Service provider. We would recommend that a larger pilot be undertaken across the sector. The purpose of this would be to refine and develop the approach and associated materials and then evaluate more fully the impact within a small number of organisations. There is evidence to suggest that there may be other benefits to the organisation, in particular in terms of staff retention. If these benefits can be identified and quantified, it may increase the return on investment from this intervention. Part of the role of this larger scale project, would be to systematically identify and measure those benefits.

Recommendation 3

Develop a Locally Based Network to coordinate CPD activities

Whilst the web portal and other structures can make information sharing more effective and efficient, the research also highlights that specialist knowledge is often context specific, highly personalised, and intuitive. This "tacit knowledge" is not as easy to write down and transfer as less complex information. What the research shows, however, is that effective, professional LSAs are rich in such knowledge, capable of solving complex problems, overcoming challenges to learning, unblocking bottle necks and impediments. This is often done without reference to any standard operating procedure.

One of the most effective contributions a development programme can make is to better facilitate of sharing practice and knowledge. The type of information that is most valuably shared is often best communicated face to face. Indeed, it was clear in talking to individuals about networks, and their experiences of training, that what they often found most valuable was the opportunity to talk with others in similar roles and share information experiences and practice. It is personal connections such as these, which can only be secured by direct contact, that are likely to have the biggest impact on practice. It follows, therefore, that it is these that need to be encouraged.

Whilst current networks are valued and useful, they are often also ad hoc and fragmented. The networks that exist have often developed organically, without a strategic overview and as a consequence, coverage is geographically uneven. The research also illustrated that very few networks are specifically targeted at LSAs. Many networks are regionally focussed, yet the findings indicate that this can be

problematic at LSA manager level, in terms of travel, time and access. It is therefore even more of a barrier to LSAs, who cannot easily be released.

The barriers to collaboration between LSAs are significant. The research findings highlighted particularly the limitations of time and resources. Accordingly, it is recommended that a local "human network" is encouraged which is cross sector, and has the ability to coordinate training needs at a local level. A number of LSAs in the project identified that this arrangement would be highly beneficial, but commented that they do not have sufficient time or resources to make these connections. Indeed one interviewee commented "it takes a lot of donkey work" to make those connections.

The recommendation is that a small scale pilot funds a role to coordinate CPD opportunities cross sector at local level. The principle was described by one person interviewed as operating almost like a dating service- putting people with needs in common together, and/ or marrying up people with needs to people /organisations with the skills set to address this. This would involve establishing a locally based network of all providers in a small geographical area. Currently a significant number of providers, operating in different sectors but in close geographical proximity, have the same training needs and yet no useful mechanisms by which to share experiences of opportunities for training. Whilst there are pockets of effective practice, better local coordination would secure both improvements in practice and more effective use of existing resource.

The real benefit of this approach is that it addresses the deficiencies which exist in human networks, which the research has identified is a significant way of transmitting knowledge skills and understanding. These cannot easily be artificially created, but by creating a mechanism to bring people with similar interests and issues together for joint training, they should naturally develop. In addition, there is a potential for more effective and efficient use of limited training resource by combining and coordinating activity more effectively. It is in effect a **shared service solution**; rather than possibly up to 30 organisations desperately trying to coordinate this activity in isolation, you bring it all together in a local area exchange. This might also facilitate additional benefits in the practical challenges of organising development activities and releasing staff.

This approach will have most benefit if organisations are clear about their training needs, and recommendations 2 and 5 should support organisations in establishing this.

Further Recommendations

Recommendation 4

Develop an organisational audit tool.

The research has generated a lot of information about good practice. This could be turned into an audit tool, which organisations could use to self assess their current practice. As with all audit tools, the purpose is to identify what is in place, rather than evaluate how well it works. It should however support organisations to begin to identify what is missing and what could usefully be developed. It could include measures relating to entitlements for induction, time for joint planning and review, checklists for teachers working with LSA and so on. A similar tool has already been developed for schools by the DfEE (now DCSF). It and related guidance can be found at:

http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DfES-0148-2000.pdf).

A checklist for teachers on working with LSAs, such as the TDA self study task and checklist for LSAs,

http://www.tda.gov.uk/teachers/sen/training_resources/pgce_programmes/selfstudy. aspx could also usefully be developed and included in the portal.

The audit tool could be completed on line and/ or stored as a downloadable document on the web portal.

Recommendation 5

Develop a profiling tool which individuals and organisations could use to assess skills, competencies, confidence and training needs against NOS and range of knowledge sets.

This would support individuals to gain an insight into their own professional abilities and providers to develop relevant organisational training plans linked to NOS. NAPTA has already developed such a product, focussing on NOS for TAs, which then signposts professional training opportunities. It has been very successful, with thousands of schools registered as members, and a similar approach could usefully be adopted for the lifelong learning sector.

Recommendation 6

Undertake research and develop systems to provide and maintain accurate workforce data.

Both the literature review and our research have shown that research around LSAs role and impact is currently very limited. Further research could be usefully undertaken, in the first instance to collect and analyse workforce data for LSAs nationally, to provide a baseline about their profile, numbers, qualification, and employment characteristics in order to better plan a cross sector workforce development strategy. Some of this information will already be collected as part of the Staff Individualised Record data, currently collected by Lifelong Learning UK, and

consideration could be usefully given to how this might be harnessed to better support training and development.

Recommendation 7

Develop a virtual centre of specialist expertise.

Local authorities already have specialist teaching support services for schools – for example teachers of the hearing impaired and the blind, or specialists in Autistic Spectrum Conditions who provide peripatetic support to pupils and staff in schools and nurseries. This could be extended to Further Education providers, and include highly skilled, experienced and ideally qualified LSAs who could operate as a virtual centre of expertise providing skilled and targeted support on an as needs basis to both learners and staff within providers. This could be undertaken as a pilot within a Local authority, and rolled out on a wider scale if successful.

Recommendation 8

Develop a career structure and progression pathway for LSAs in lifelong learning with relevant nationally recognised qualifications from Levels 2 – 4.

Information about qualifications should be published on the LSA portal.

Recommendation 9

Review Initial Teacher Training and CPD specifications for teachers to ensure that they include working with support staff.

Recommendation 10

Research and review training and CPD for managers of LSAs to ensure that management development includes their role in organisational development and managing change.

Recommendation 11

Collate, develop and publish guidance and protocols on alternative CPD approaches such as shadowing, buddying and mentoring.

Recommendation 12

Encourage the development of e-learning resources for LSAs and LSA managers.

Existing resources should be identified and signposted on the LSA portal.

Recommendation 13

Develop resources to support organisations in involving learners in identifying their own support needs.

It was clear from the learner focus groups that learners feel they could and should be more involved in identifying their support needs and the manner in which it is provided. This would also facilitate moves towards greater personalisation and increased choice and control for learners with disability, both of which are key policy objectives. Research could usefully be undertaken to identify effective practice in the sector, and develop protocol and guidance to support this.

Recommendation 14

LSIS and its partners to undertake further research to identify how existing structures and systems influence the provision and nature of support and potentially discourage independence.

The literature review has strongly indicated that an inclusive approach to support is more effective, that is, support often works best when it is directed at a group, rather than targeted at an individual. In addition, the importance of "stepping back", when appropriate, in order to promote independence, has previously been identified. The potential to reduce or refine the provision of support is however often restricted by systemic arrangements such as funding agreements, audit arrangements and contract specifications.

Recommendation 15

Explore the potential of technology for further promoting independence and identify best practice within the sector to reduce reliance on physical support.

Annex 1: Steering Group

Alison Boulton: Natspec (Chair)

Viv Berkeley: Niace

Andrew Chiffers: Farleigh FE College, Frome

Mark Dale: Portland College

Graham Jowett: Treloars College

Joy Mercer: AoC

Anne Price: David Lewis College

Ann Ruthven: LSIS

Helen Sexton: National Star College

Caroline Smale, Henshaws College

Haydn Thomas: West of England College

Ruth Thomas: Derwen College

Barbara Waters: Skill

Annex 2: Contributing Organisations

Representative and Professional Organisations

157 Group

AoC

CETT for Inclusive Learning

Greater Manchester Learning Provider Federation (GMLPF)

HOLEX

IFL

Karten Network

LANDEX

MENCAP

NAPTA

NASS

Natspec

NIACE

Ofsted

OLASS

SKILL

Techdis

Unison

Providers

Beaumont College of Further Education

Brooksby Melton College

Carshalton College

Coventry Adult Services

David Lewis College

Derbyshire County Council /REACT

Dudley College

Farleigh F E College Frome

Hartpury College

Macclesfield College

MacIntyre

Manchester College

Mencap National College – Dilston

Mencap National College - Lufton

Newham Local Authority

Northamptonshire County Council

Northern College

Northern Counties College

Oaklands College

Protocol Skills

Pure Innovations

Ruskin Mill Educational Trust – Freeman College

South Cheshire College

Supporting Transformations

Sutton College of Learning for Adults (SCOLA)

Walsall Adult and Community College

West of England College

Weston College

Worcester Sixth Form College

Wirral Metropolitan College

Annex 3: Contributors

Warwick Andrews	Clive Fowler	Ruth Perry
Ellen Atkinson	John Gardner	Stan Pochron
Ann Bailey	Cathie Gascoigne	Bob Powell
Maggie Balshaw	Sharon Grainger	Sue Preece
Stephanie Baslington	Terry Harrington	Sue Prescott
Viv Berkeley	Paul Harrison	Anne Price
Kerry Boffy	Helen Herries	Donald Rae
Alison Boulton	Cerri Hibbert	Andrew Read
Maria Chambers	Pat Hopkins	Gill Richards
Joyce Charlton	Marilyn Hunter	Tessa Ring
Andrew Chiffers	Michelle Jennings	Meg Rogers
Amanda Clarke	Carole Jones	John Rowley
Lesley Dee	Christine Lewis	Lynne Sedgemore
Joyce Deere	Natalie Macpherson	Karen Southam
Terry Docking	Sam Mayhew	Haydn Thomas
Claire Dorer	Kieran McKee	Glenys Tucker
Lisa Duncalfe	Alistair McNaught	Rob Tulip
Pat Dyson	Joy Mercer	Angie Ward
Bonny Etchell Anderson	Jenny Murphy	Ianthe Wassail
Lynn Etheridge	Alan Newbold	Barbara Waters
Toni Fazaeli	June O'Brien	Shaun Wilkins
Sarah Freeman	Graham Patrick	

Annex 4: Learner Focus Groups -Contributors

The project would like to thank the learners in the following colleges and organisations for their time, enthusiasm and commitment in making this series of focus groups possible.

Artshape, Gloucester

Exeter Deaf Academy, Exeter

Gloucestershire College, Gloucester

Gloucestershire County Council (Supernova adult learning class), Gloucester

National Star College, Cheltenham

New College Worcester

Royal National College for the Blind, Hereford

Speak Advocacy

Annex 5: Sample of Interviews

Type	No. of interviewees	No. of organisations
Representative/membership	12	16
ACL/LA	6	7
FE & SFC	10	10
FE Landbased	2	2
ISC	15	8
WBL	4	4
Ofsted	3	1
HE	1	1
HMP & YOI	8	8
Independent expert/consultant	6	6
OLASS	1	1
Voluntary	1	1
LSAs	53	8
Learners	54	6

Annex 6: Project reports

Enhancement of learning support: the training and development needs of learning support assistants

Findings and recommendations

The views of learning support assistants and their managers

Training and Development Opportunities

The views of learners

What learners think (easy read version)

Literature review

Resource bank

Annex 7: Project Team

Project managers:

Alison O'Brien

Kevin O'Brien

Project team:

Richard Amos

Sally Faraday

David Finch

John Gush

Brian Simpson

Project Administrator:

Maria Coulson

Annex 8: Semi structured interview schedule for LSAs

For LSAs -Training needs

Date of Interview: **Provider(s):**

No. of LSAs: **Range of Learners Supported: Discrete/ Mainstream**

1. What qualifications/training are currently used/provided?

1a What role(s) do you fulfil in your organisation? (preliminary question to set the context)

1b What are the main areas of your role – e.g. 1:1 support, group support, behaviour support, communication support, contribution to assessment, planning and recording, support in the workplace/for employment other?

1c What training did you receive when you started (induction)? What else, if anything, would you have liked?

1d What nationally accredited qualifications are you expected to achieve?

1e What CPD in-house training have you had (with prompts)? Mandatory (e.g. first aid, manual handling etc) and practice (eg teaching & learning, self assessment, etc)

1f Have you had any specific training in relation to Valuing Employment or Foundation Learning? (If yes, explore what and impact)

1g Do you have examples of effective training materials and resources and/or staff with expertise in training/ professional development for LSAs?

1h If yes, would you be prepared to share these/ discuss this in more detail with my colleague (get details)

2. Focus and Impact of training

2a Has the training just been for LSAs or has it been with other staff such as tutors?

2b Has the training you have received supported you in your role? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?

2c Are there any changes you might like to suggest to improve the quality of the training you receive – to content or delivery?

2d Has the training included the relationship between your LSA role and the role of tutors?

2e Please identify any significant gaps in your training.

2f How do you think these gaps might be filled? (E.g. formal qualifications, CPD opportunities, e-learning, mentoring, coaching other?)

2g What methods approaches have been most effective in supporting you to acquire skills and understanding (is it through training, or working alongside others etc.)

2h What methods of delivery have you experienced and which do you prefer and why e.g. courses (day, half day, weekly etc) working alongside others, e-learning, mentoring, shadowing, observation, etc)

2i What do you feel would be the best approach to support your professional development?

2j What areas would you like it to cover? Are there any areas where you feel most in need of support?

2k What training do you feel is important for staff who manage you (Managers and teachers)?

2l Do you feel the tutors you are working with know how to use you to the best effect?

2m What opportunities do you get to network with other staff doing the same role and how?

2n Do you feel you receive appropriate guidance about what you do and how you do it?

2o Are there any entitlement /access issues to training? If so, what are these?

2p If it is a residential provision, please also explore the impact of compliance training component for staff working in residential provision

2q Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time

Annex 9: Semi structured interview schedule for LSA Managers

For Managers -Training needs in relation to LSAs

Date of Interview: **Provider:**

Manager Position:

1. <u>What qualifications/training are currently used/provided?</u>

1a What role(s) do LSAs fulfil in your organisation? (preliminary question to set the context)

1b What do you think are the training needs of LSAs?

1c What training do you offer for LSAs- at induction and what CPD? Is it mandatory?

1d Which nationally accredited qualifications do you provide?

1e Do you have examples of effective training materials and resources and/or staff with expertise in training/ professional development for LSAs?
      Yes/No

1f If yes, would you be prepared to share these/ discuss this in more detail with my colleague (get details)

2. Focus and Impact of training

2a How do you allocate training? i.e. how much, who gets it, any difference between part time and full time staff?

2b How do you decide the focus (or priorities?) for training?

2c Do the training and qualifications you currently provide meet all the professional development needs of LSAs?

2d If not, what do you think are the gaps in training and development for LSAs? What improvements might you suggest – to content or delivery?

2e How do you think these gaps might be filled? (E.g. formal qualifications, CPD opportunities, e-learning, mentoring, coaching other?)

2f What do you think are the training implications of Valuing Employment for LSAs- any new roles e.g. job coaching, support in the workplace, travel?

2g What about with regard to Foundation Learning?

2h How does professional development of LSAs strike the balance between learning support and learner support?

2i How do you evaluate the performance of LSAs and use that to 1) inform training 2) evaluate the impact of training?

2j What if any are the barriers to training - are there any workforce characteristics that are relevant (e.g. FT/PT staff etc)

2k What training is available for staff who manage LSAs- tutors and managers?

2l Is time allowed for tutors and LSAs to liaise and if so how much?

2m What are the key issues you feel training should address for managers of LSA?

2n How should training be delivered? e.g. meetings, courses, e-learning, manuals, shadowing, advanced practitioners, other? (Any difference for managers v LSAs?)

2o This piece of work will result in a training programme for LSAs. What delivery model do you think is most effective?

2p What regional networks are there?

2q What is their focus?

2r What do you think could be done to expand these to support training?

2s If it is a residential provision, please also explore the impact of compliance training component for staff working in residential provision

2t Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time

Annex 10: Interview questions
Enhancement of Learning Support - Opportunities and Resources

Overall aim of the project

- To develop a training programme for learning support assistants and those who manage them, across the full range of contexts in the lifelong learning sector

The project seeks to identify:

- The training and development needs of LSAs and those who manage them

- **Existing professional development opportunities undertaken by a) LSAs and b) those who manage them**

  - **at induction**

  - **for continuing professional development**

  - **to achieve qualification and career progression**

- Existing networks at national, regional and local level and how they might be developed to deliver training for LSAs and those who manage them

The focus of this report is to identify what existing professional development opportunities are undertaken by LSAs in relation to:

a) Induction

1. What is the *content* of induction for LSAs?
2. What *delivery methods* are used?
3. What *materials* are used?
   - Are they developed in house? If so, could we have a copy?
   - If not, which materials do you use and where are they from?
4. What are the most and least effective aspects of induction?
5. What are the gaps? How could they be filled?

b) Continuous professional development

6. What content areas does CPD for LSAs cover? General? Specific?
7. What *delivery methods* are used for CPD?
   - Individual support, describe
   - mentoring, describe
   - job shadowing, describe
   - group sessions, describe
   - on-line material, describe
   - other, describe
8. What *materials* are used?
   - Are they developed in-house? If so, could we have a copy?
   - If not, which materials do you use and where are they from?
9. Are any aspects of CPD *accredited*? If so, which? By which awarding bod(y/ies)?
10. Do they relate to the national standards? If so, which standards? And how?
11. What are the most and least effective aspects of CPD?
12. What are the gaps? How could they be filled?

c) LSA qualifications

13. Are all LSAs expected to hold or work towards qualifications?
14. Which qualifications do LSAs undertake? At what level(s)?
    - What is the name of the award(s)? Why did you choose this award?
    - Which awarding body is it accredited by?
    - Roughly what content does it cover?
    - Is it offered in-house or externally? If so, by whom?
    - For awards that are competence based, how do you ensure that LSAs meet the performance criteria? What training/experience do you provide? What methods do you use?
15. Does/do the qualification(s) relate to the national standards? If so, which standards? And how?
16. Which aspects of qualifications are considered to be the most and least relevant and useful? Why?
17. What are the gaps? How could they be filled?
18. What is the career pathway for LSAs?

Part-time/ sessional LSAs

19. Are the opportunities for *part-time/sessional* LSAs the same as for full-time staff? If not, how do they differ? Why?

Those who manage LSAs

20. What existing professional development opportunities are undertaken by *those who manage* LSAs that are different from/additional to those described above? Describe the difference.
21. What are the most and least effective aspects of professional development activity for those who manage LSAs?
22. What are the gaps? How could they be filled?

General

23. Do you know of any other organisations that have particularly good professional development opportunities for LSAS?
24. Do you have examples of effective training materials and resources and/or staff with expertise in training/ professional development for LSAs?
25. If yes, would you be prepared to share these/ discuss this in more detail?
26. Are there any other training materials, packages or courses that you or others have found particularly useful? If so which?
27. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time

Annex 11: Semi structured interview schedule used to explore networks

1. What networks currently exists?

2. Which providers are included?

3. Who is network for – managers, practitioners, LAs?

4. Are LSAs included? If so how?

5. Is there a separate strand for LSAs? If yes, how does it work? If no, could there be?

6. How does it work? What is the focus? Formats – electronic?

7. Is the network currently being used to deliver training? If so, what?

8. Does the network link formally with LA strategic/partnership groups?

Annex 12: Session plan for use with learner focus groups

Sessions range according to the circumstances of each group. No session was less than an hour long with some sessions at 2 1/2 hours long

Ice Breaker – 10 minutes

Warm up 'speed dating' activity. Learners are asked to move around the group and think of a different thing to say to each member of the group about themselves. They must move to another person after 10 seconds when the whistle is sounded.

Learners to be asked about their courses and whether they have come from a specialist school or through mainstream education. Learners to be asked how much support they are currently receiving.

Defining Learner Support – 15 minutes

What Is Learner support – group to formulate definition together – write key words then construct definition – 10 minutes – flip chart

Using the key words make a statement about what learner support might be.

Focus on support – 60 minutes

3 groups of 4 or 5 learners – each group does 20 minutes per workshop rotating through all three

Workshop1. – Making a drama out of support

Plan a story or short piece of drama – 5 minutes maximum on **what learning support means to you**. You can make this anyway you choose – serious, funny. You could make it positive (good support) or show the negative (bad support). This will be filmed through the flip camera.

Workshop 2 – Creative support

As a group write a poem or a song or draw a poster which captures the **group's feelings** about learning support – Try to think about the key words you would use – you may want to think back to the first exercise in defining support.

Workshop 3 – Radiohead

As a group of learners you have been asked to appear on the radio – You will be interviewed about what learning support means to you. This will be recorded.

The questions will be;

- How does learner support help you with your learning?

- What is good about having a support person with you in your classes?
- What could be done better?
- What would your advice be to a support worker?

Activity 2 – Expectations – 30 minutes

Split into 3 groups of 5 or less to discuss – one theme per group

1. Attitudes – spider gram
2. Approach – spider gram
3. How support is delivered – spidergram – 20 minutes - flipchart

Share thoughts gaining general consensus from each theme – 10 min - flipchart

Activity 3 – Values – 25min

Diary room – Plan and record

1. What things you feel are important about teaching support
2. How would you like to give your views in the future

Annex 13: Offender Learning Questionnaire

The Enhancement of Learning Support

Natspec is one of a number of key national partners working with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) to implement a sector led approach to quality improvement across the sector. Natspec's focus is to develop a national programme of CPD to improve the quality and management of learning support for learners with additional needs across the FE sector.

In order to fulfil this remit Natspec is keen to gain a better understanding of the way learning support is provided in prisons and across the offender learning sector.

Please could you help by completing this questionnaire and returning it to me by email.

Any information you supply will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be shared in a way that could make it attributable either to you or to your organisation.

Please contact John for any further information on this project. Thanks.

John Gush

Name of person completing the questionnaire   Role

Name of establishment   Date

Roughly how many offenders does your establishment serve? Up to:

50	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000

Roughly how many of those offenders take part in learning activities? Up to:

50	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000

Is learning support available for offender learners in your establishment?

(Learning support is defined as provision that enables the learner to engage with the learning programme and provides personalised, identified support that allows them to maximise their independence as a learner, to achieve and to progress.)

Never	Sometimes, when identified as being needed	Always, when identified as being needed

In what kind of programmes is support available?

	Y / N	Please provide some details
Foundation learning		
vocational skills		
Functional skills		
Skills for life		
Other		

Who provides learning support in OL settings in your prison?

	Never? Occasionally? Regularly?
Learning Support Assistants **(i.e. those staff who have direct and regular contact with the learner (or group of learners) to facilitate their access to identified support, within the learning process and under the direction of the person(s) leading the learning.)**	
Learning mentors **(i.e. prisoners who, with or without specific training, support other offender learners)**	
Others **(please describe)**	
Please add any other information to help us understand how learning is supported in your establishment	

Please could you say something about the comparative availability and deployment of learning support in these three pairs of provision?

	None	Details
YOI		
Adult		
Short stay		
Long stay		
Provision that is in scope for OLASS		
Provision that is out of scope for OLASS		

How is the requirement for support identified and assessed?

What training or CPD is available for LSAs or others who offer learning support in your prison?

	None	Occasional	Regular	Details
Mentoring				
Shadowing				
Observation				
E-learning				

Formal qualifications			84	
One off training courses (external)				
One off training courses (in-house)				
Paper based resources- e.g. handbooks				
Meeting others practitioners				

Please add any further information that will help us to understand the issues around the provision of, and training for, learning support in your prison

Thank you for your time

Annex 14: Learning Support Practitioners Online questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. This questionnaire is part of the Enhancement of Learning Support project being delivered by Natspec on behalf of LSIS

Overall aim of the project is

- To develop a training programme for learning support practitioners and those who manage them, across the full range of contexts in the lifelong learning sector

This questionnaire is for learning support practitioners and its purpose is

- To identify your training and development needs
- To identify your existing professional development opportunities
- To identify existing networks at national, regional and local level

The questionnaire is for learning support practitioners in **any** learning provider working with young people and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It should take 10-15 minutes to complete.

The enhancement of learning support: terminology

In using the term **"Learning support practitioner" (LSP)** we are referring to those staff who have direct and regular contact with the learner (or group of learners) to facilitate their access to identified support, within the learning process and under the direction of the person(s) leading the learning.

Learning support is about enabling the learner to engage with the learning programme and providing personalised, identified support that will allow them to maximise their independence as a learner, achieve and progress.

This project focuses on **learning support** and the role of the **learning support practitioner** as defined above. It does **not** cover **learner support**, which is about enabling the learner to participate by overcoming potential barriers. Learner support provides funding (e.g. for childcare, transport) and services (e.g. Guidance, benefits information, counselling) which enable the learner to access the appropriate learning environment. The project does not therefore cover the staff who support these functions, nor those such as librarians and technicians whose work does not focus on providing this support to individual learners.

It will also explore the **management** of learning support in the following ways:

- Line management/supervision

- "Classroom" management by the person leading the learning.

Confidentiality Statement

The information supplied by you will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be shared in a way that could make it attributable either to you or to your organisation.

This questionnaire is about **you** and **your** personal development needs. There are two sections:

- Section 1 is about you and your role
- Section 2 is about your training and development needs

Section 1: You and your role

1. What is your job title?

2. Which of these categories best describes the organisation you work for?

FE College   ISC   Work Based Learning   adult   and   community   learning offender learning

If other describe

3. Please indicate the number of years you have been in your current post

          1-3   3-5   5-10   10+

4. Did you have any experience of working in an educational organisation before becoming a Learning Support Practitioner?

Yes   No

4. Approximately how many registered full or part time learners does you organisation provide for?

Approximately how many full or part time learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities does your organisation provide for?

Section 2: Your training and development needs

Part 1 - Qualifications and training currently provided

1. What training did you receive when you started (induction)? Please list

```
```

2. What nationally accredited qualifications have you completed or are you expected to achieve?

```
```

3. What CPD in-house training have you had eg Mandatory (eg first aid, manual handling etc) and practice (eg teaching & learning, self assessment, etc) Please list

```
```

Part 2 - Focus and Impact

4.   Please rate the extent to which your induction was effective in supporting you in your role? (5 point rating)

Please use this space if you want to provide more information

```
```

5   Please rate the extent to which you feel the nationally accredited training provided fully meets your needs as a learning support practitioner 1-5 ratings

Please use this space if you want to provide more information

```
```

6.   Please rate the extent to which you feel the in-house/ CPD provided meets your needs as a learning support practitioner 1-5 ratings

Please use this space if you want to provide more information

┌───┐
│   │
│   │
│   │
└───┘

7.   Please rate the following training and development activities to indicate which you feel are the most effective in supporting you to develop your skills and understanding

1 to 5 rating scale, **plus** a 'no experience of' option

- Mentoring
- Shadowing
- Observation
- E-learning
- Formal qualifications
- One off training courses (external)
- One off training courses (in-house)
- Paper based resources- e.g. handbooks
- Meeting others practitioners

Please use this space if there is anything else you would like to add

┌───┐
│   │
│   │
│   │
└───┘

8.   Have you ever used an e-learning programme for your professional development Y/N

If yes, how would you rate e-learning as a tool to support your development

 Rated 1-5

Please use this space if you are able to identify what e-learning materials you used or wish to comment further

┌───┐
│   │
│   │
│   │
└───┘

9.   Please rate the following to indicate how essential these are in supporting you to develop your practice

A 5 point rating scale

- Training to support teaching and learning
- Training to support communication
- Training to support personal care
- Training to support behaviour
- Training to support employment
- Training to support literacy and numeracy

Please use this space if there are other aspects of training which you feel are important not mentioned above

Please use this space if you want to identify any significant gaps in your training and/or areas where you feel most in need of support

10   How would you rate the following as potential barriers to your ability to develop as a Learning Support Practitioner

Rating 1-5

- Resources
- Time for development activities
- Knowledge of opportunities
- Support/encouragement from the organisation you work for
- Lack of rewards for achievement
- Lack of knowledge of where performance is weak

Please use this space if there are other potential barriers to training you would like to identify

11 Please rate the extent to which you feel you are appropriately guided by the tutors you work with Rate 1-5

12 How do you rate your opportunities to network with:
- Other LSPS doing the same role in your own organisation rate 1-5
- Other LSPs doing the same role from other organisations rate 1-5
- Other practitioners working with learners with learning difficulties and disabilities from other organisations   rate 1-5

Please use this space to identify any local or regional networks you are aware of.

Please use this space for anything else you would like to add.

If you have any examples of effective training materials and resources and/or staff with expertise in training/ professional development for LSPs please use the space below . Alternatively, you may leave your details and we will contact you.

If you are willing to be contacted about any of your responses, please leave your contact details here, and a member of the project team will contact you.

Name

Email address

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Annex 15: Managers of Learning Support Practitioners Online Questionnaire.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. The questionnaire is part of the enhancement of learning support project being delivered by Natspec on behalf of LSIS.

Overall aim of the project is

- To develop a training programme for learning support practitioners and those who manage them, across the full range of contexts in the lifelong learning sector

This questionnaire is for those that manage LSPs and its purpose is

- To identify the training and development needs

- To identify existing professional development opportunities

- To identify existing networks at national, regional and local level and how they might be developed to deliver training.

The questionnaire is for managers of learning support practitioners in **any** learning provider working with young people and adults with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. It should take 10-15minutes to complete

The enhancement of learning support: terminology

In using the term **"Learning support practitioner"** we are referring to those staff who have direct and regular contact with the learner (or group of learners) to facilitate their access to identified support, within the learning process and under the direction of the person(s) leading the learning.

Learning support is about enabling the learner to engage with the learning programme and providing personalised, identified support that will allow them to maximise their independence as a learner, achieve and progress.

This project focuses on **learning support** and the role of the **learning support practitioner** as defined above. It does **not** cover **learner support**, which is about enabling the learner to participate by overcoming potential barriers. Learner support provides funding (e.g. for childcare, transport) and services (e.g. Guidance, benefits information, counselling) which enable the learner to access the appropriate learning environment. The project does not therefore cover the staff who support these functions, nor those such as librarians and technicians whose work does not focus on providing this support to individual learners.

It will also explore the **management** of learning support in the following ways:

- Line management/supervision

- "Classroom" management by the person leading the learning.

Confidentiality Statement

The information supplied by you will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be shared in a way that could make it attributable either to you or to your organisation.

This questionnaire is about **you** and **your** personal development needs and the training and development of those you manage. There are three sections:

Section 1 is about you and your role

Section 2 is about the training and development needs of the LSPs you manage

Section 3 is about your training and development needs

Section 1 : You and your role

1.What is your job title?

2. Which of these categories best describes the organisation you work for?

FE College   ISC   Work Based Learning   adult   and   community   learning offender learning

If other describe

3. Please indicate the number of years you have been in your current post

  1-3   3-5   5-10   10+

4. Approximately how many registered full or part time learners does your organisation provide for?

Approximately how many full or part time learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities does your organisation provide for?

Section 2 The training and development needs of the LSPs you manage

5.   What induction training do your LSPs receive? Please list

```



```

6.   What nationally accredited qualifications do you expect your LSPs to achieve?

```

```

7.   What CPD in-house training does your organisation provide for LSPs   eg Mandatory (eg first aid, manual handling etc) and practice (eg teaching & learning, self assessment, etc) Please list

```

```

8.   Do you think there are any gaps in the training provided for LSPs? Yes/ no
      If yes, what improvements would you suggest in content or delivery?

```

```

9.   Please rate the following to indicate how essential you think these are in supporting your Learning Support Practitioners to develop their practice

A 5 point rating scale

- Training to support teaching and learning
- Training to support communication
- Training to support personal care
- Training to support behaviour
- Training to support employment
- Training to support literacy and numeracy

Please use this space if there are other aspects of training which you feel are important not mentioned above

```



```

10. How would you rate the following as potential barriers to the training and development of Learning Support Practitioners?

Rating 1-5

- Resources
- Time for development activities
- Knowledge of opportunities
- Support/encouragement from the organisation you work for
- Lack of rewards for achievement
- Lack of knowledge of where performance is weak

Please use this space if there are other potential barriers to training you would like to identify

```

```

11. Please rate the extent to which you feel the Learning Support Practitioners you manage are appropriately guided by the tutors they work with. Rate 1-5
Please use this space if you wish to make any further comments.

```

```

12. Does your organisation provide training for staff about directing and guiding Learning Support Staff in the learning environment?

Yes/no

If yes, please rate the effectiveness of this training rate 1-15

Please use this space if you wish to make any further comments.

```

```

Section 3 – Your training and development needs

1. Please rate the extent to which your induction was effective in supporting you in your role as a manager of Learning Support Practitioners? (5 point rating)

Please use this space if you want to provide more information

```

```

2.   What nationally accredited training have you completed or are you expected to complete by your employer? Please list here

```

```

3.   What in--house/ CPD has been provided? Please list here

```

```

Please rate the extent to which you feel the training and development provided meets your needs as a manager of learning support practitioners

   1-5 ratings

   Please use this space if you want to provide more information

```

```

4.   Please rate the following training and development activities to indicate which you feel are the most effective in supporting you to develop your skills and understanding

1 to 5 rating scale, **plus** a 'no experience of' option

- Mentoring
- Shadowing
- Observation
- E-learning
- Formal qualifications
- One off training courses (external)
- One off training courses (in-house)
- Paper based resources- e.g. handbooks
- Meeting others practitioners

Please use this space if there is anything else you would like to add

```

```

5.   Have you ever used an e-learning programme for your professional development Yes /No

If yes, how would you rate e-learning as a tool to support your development

Rated 1-5

Please use this space if you are able to identify what e-learning materials you used or wish to comment further

```
```

6.   How do you rate your opportunities to network with :
   - Other managers of LSPs doing the same role from other organisations   rate 1-5
   - Other practitioners working with learners with learning difficulties and disabilities from other organisations   rate 1-5

Please use this space to identify any local or regional networks you are aware of.

```
```

Please use this space for anything else you would like to add.

```
```

If you have any examples of effective training materials and resources and/or staff with expertise in training/ professional development for LSPs please use the space below . Alternatively, you may leave your details and we will contact you.

```
```

If you are willing to be contacted about any of your responses, please leave your contact details here, and a member of the project team will contact you.

Name

Email address

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Annex 16: Copy of documents developed by Farleigh FE College Frome (FFEC) to support the observation of Learning Support Assistants

Observation Evidence Form for Learning Support
Name of Learner Learning Support Assistant Date
Context Lecture   Lecturer College Other information
Observation/evidence
Strengths
Areas for development
Actions   **Review date**

Criteria for Judgments on Learning Support

To be completed by the observer and discussed with the LSA

1: Outstanding   2:Good   3:Satisfactory   4:Unsatisfactory

Being prepared for the session, attending to learner's support needs, including producing alternative resources	1	2	3	4
Strategies for managing learner's anxiety / behaviour / approach to work	1	2	3	4
Blending with the group	1	2	3	4
Effective checking of learner's understanding	1	2	3	4
Balancing between supporting and promoting self reliance	1	2	3	4
Evidence of understanding of learning style and the effect of learner's own version of autistic spectrum condition	1	2	3	4
Marking scheme: 8 or below: Grade 1 14 or below: Grade 2 20 or below: Grade 3 21 or more: Grade 4	**Total:**			

Grade:

Signed:
(observer)

Signed:
(LSA)

Date:

Self evaluation by LSW

Comments from lecturer

Comments from learner

Summary from observer

Grade

Signed(observer)   **signed (LSW)**

date

Annex 17: Glossary of Terms

ACL   Adult and Community Learning

AoC   Association of Colleges

CETT   Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Training

CETTIL   Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Training in Inclusive Learning

CPD   Continuous Professional Development

DCSF   Department for Children, Schools and Families

DfEE   Department for Education and Employment

EO   Employment Officer

FE   Further Education Colleges

FFEC   Farleigh FE College

HE   Higher Education

HMP   Her Majesty's Prisons

HOL   Head of Learning Support

IFL   Institute for Learning

ILP   Individual Learning Plan

ISC   Independent Specialist Colleges

ITT   Initial Teacher Training

LA   Local Authority

LSA   Learning Support Assistant

LSIS   Learning and Skills Improvement Service

LSP   Learning Support Practitioner

LSRC   Learning and Skills Research Centre

NADP   National Association of Disability Practitioners

NAPTA   National Association of Professional Teaching Assistants

NASS   National Association of Independent Schools & Non-Maintained Special Schools

Natspec   Association of National Specialist Colleges

NIACE   National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

NCSL   National College for School Leadership

NOS   National Occupational Standards

NVQ   National Vocational Qualifications

OCNSW   Open College Network South West

Ofsted   Office for Standards in Education

OL   Offender Learning

OLASS   Offenders' Learning and Skills Service

PTLLS   Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector

SFC   Sixth Form College

SWWDP   South West Workforce Development Partnership

TA   Teaching Assistants

TDA   Training and Development Agency for Schools

TSI   Training by Systematic Instruction

WBL   Work Based Learning

YOI   Young Offender Institution